

# The Morality of Bureaucratic Politics: Allegations of “Spoiling” in a UN Inter-Agency War

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*This study examines the moral connotations and political use of three scientific concepts: bureaucratic spoiling, agency slack, and bureaucratic politics. These concepts served as moral allegations against political opponents in a conflict between two United Nations (UN) agencies: The 1982–91 struggle of the World Food Programme (WFP) for institutional autonomy from the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO). On each side of the FAO-WFP conflict, the other was depicted as a spoiler of the UN’s mission, shirking its obligations, and engaging in bureaucratic turf battles. The negative depiction of the other side justified each side’s struggle against the other. The empirical findings strike a cautionary note for future research on bureaucratic spoiling, agency slack, bureaucratic politics, and similar moral-political phenomena.*

## Introduction<sup>1</sup>

In September 1988, the social science journal *Society* dedicated a special symposium to an analysis of the largest specialized agency in the UN system, the Rome-based Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO). In eight articles, nine contributors set out their answers to the question “The UN’s FAO: Is It DOA?” The answers differed vastly. In the lead contribution, Juliana Pilon, a senior policy analyst at the Heritage Foundation of Washington, D.C., argued that FAO should “die a well-deserved death,” because of its leftist ideology and its tyrannical Director-General Edouard Saouma (Pilon 1988: 10). Pilon described Saouma as a bureaucratic despot of the worst kind, who went so far as to delay, in June 1984, the approval of an emergency food aid request from Ethiopia for twenty days, simply because the Ethiopian representative in Rome supported Saouma’s bitter enemy: James Ingram, head of the joint UN/FAO World Food Programme (WFP).

Of the eight other contributors to the *Society* symposium, three supported Pilon’s allegations in most or at least in significant parts, among them a renowned scholar of international relations, Raymond Hopkins (1988). One author focused exclusively on FAO’s role in Ethiopia and argued the 1984 delay was probably not deliberate but still condemnable (Varnis 1988). The remaining four contributors, however, defended Saouma. John Cohen, a fellow at the Harvard Institute for International Development, and Michael Westlake, an economic advisor to Kenya’s Ministry of Agriculture, argued that Pilon’s article was characteristic of “advocacy journalism” by “advocacy foundations” such as the Heritage Foundation. Cohen and Westlake claimed Pilon’s arguments were based on “preconceived ideas and positions,” and violated “established patterns of proof” (Cohen and Westlake 1988: 41). Also, two high-ranking FAO staff members, of American and Danish nationality, defended their organization and director-general in separate articles (Huddleston 1988; Lydiker 1988).

Was Saouma a “bureaucratic spoiler” as defined by Trettin and Junk in this special issue? Did he consciously counteract his organization’s mission? This study will not formulate a definite answer to this question, nor will it make a case for who of the nine contributors to

1. I thank Julian Junk, Frederik Trettin, Joel Winckler, Ariel Pate, and three anonymous reviewers for their constructive comments.

*Society* is wrong or right. The goal of this article, more limited in scope, is to strike a cautionary note by showing why certain questions such as, “Was Saouma a spoiler?” “If not him, then who was the spoiler at the world food organizations?” “Who shirked their obligations, and counteracted the UN’s mission?” can be problematic research questions. In certain situations, research would be better served by asking another kind of question.

The problem with asking whether Saouma was a spoiler is not only that the range of answers in *Society* is so wide, the status of contributors so contestable, and the interpretation of the same facts so diverse but also the problem lies in the moral-political nature of the disagreement. In fact, the question “Who counteracted the UN’s mission?” was an object of political contention in one of the most protracted and escalated bureaucratic conflicts in the history of the UN system: the struggle of the World Food Programme (WFP), the UN’s food aid agency, for institutional independence from the FAO between 1982 and 1991.

The FAO-WFP conflict positioned not only the agencies and their executive leaders, FAO Director-General Saouma of Lebanon and WFP Executive Director Ingram of Australia, against each other. It also involved the governments of UN member countries. Like the contributors to *Society*, the parties disagreed in their answers to the spoiler question. Ingram and his allies saw Saouma as a bureaucratic dictator who counteracted the UN’s mission in the pursuit of his personal power and FAO’s turf interests. Saouma and his allies believed Ingram and the industrialized countries, particularly the U.S., strived to terminate FAO’s oversight over WFP’s food aid in the pursuit of their own personal and national economic interests, counteracting FAO’s mission to protect and develop the agricultural economies of the global south.

The allegations against Saouma in *Society* correspond to moral allegations against a political opponent in the conflict over WFP’s independence from FAO. In this situation, the goal of this study is not the formulation of an objective, neutral, and scientific answer to the spoiler question. Instead, the goal is to better understand the consequences of the moral-political disagreement over this question. The main argument of this study is that this disagreement was the moral and political driving force of the FAO-WFP conflict. Senior UN staff and government officials spent nine years fighting against each other, because both sides of the struggle over WFP’s independence could justify their actions as directed against a morally evil, greedy spoiler of the UN’s mission.

The argument proceeds in two steps. The first main section of the study will show how Ingram’s struggle for institutional autonomy from FAO was justified and motivated by the depiction of Saouma as “the spoiler.” The second section will demonstrate that Saouma’s struggle against WFP’s independence was justified and motivated by the depiction of Ingram and his Western allies as “the spoilers.” Both sections are based on primary sources: The diaries and a book by Ingram (2007), a book by Saouma (1993); historical documents such as speeches, verbatim records, letters, and memoranda from the FAO Archives and the WFP Library in Rome; and twenty-eight oral history interviews with twenty-five former UN staff and government officials conducted in 2011 and 2012.

Besides a better understanding of the origins and nature of the FAO-WFP conflict, the more general goal of this study is to problematize a certain way of asking research questions. Based on the empirical findings, the study comes to the conclusion that the scientific project to define and model bureaucratic spoiling, as well as agency slack and shirking, bureaucratic politics and bureaucratic turf battles, and other kinds of so-called “dark side behavior,”<sup>2</sup> is, in certain situations, a problematic project. Some important organizational phenomena, such as the FAO-WFP conflict, are better understood as the effects of moral-political disagreement over the spoiler question, rather than the effects of actual spoiling.

2. For spoiling, see Tretin and Junk, this issue; Stedman (1997), for agency slack and shirking, see Hawkins et al. (2006), for “bureaucratic politics,” see Allison and Zelikow (1999: chpt.5), and for “dark side behavior,” see Vaughan (1999).

### James Ingram's Fight against Spoiling

*Saouma epitomizes what is wrong, i.e., the use of the [UN] system for the pursuit of personal power.*

—James Ingram, diary entry, 28

The depiction of FAO Director-General Edouard Saouma as a greedy spoiler may be found in a number of scientific and journalistic works.<sup>3</sup> The most well-known of these depictions is probably Graham Hancock's portrayal of Saouma as a "lord of poverty" (Hancock 1989: 85–89). Hancock, a British journalist, has assembled numerous allegations against Saouma. According to Hancock's sources—newspaper articles, unnamed American and Canadian diplomats, and a Colombian election opponent to Saouma, Gonzalo Bula Hoyos—Saouma used staff appointments and aid projects to reward allies and cultivate political friendships. The June 1984 delay of the approval of the Ethiopian emergency aid request is also mentioned by Hancock.

The goal of this section is to analyze the moral and political role the allegations against Saouma played in WFP Executive Director Ingram's struggle for the independence of his organization from the FAO. The section will describe how and why Ingram, whom Saouma himself had appointed in 1982, came to perceive Saouma as a greedy spoiler in the months before and after his appointment, and how Ingram's perceptions of Saouma informed a stable moral world view, according to which Saouma epitomized what was wrong with the UN system: agency slack, shirking, and the reckless pursuit of bureaucratic politics. Then, the section will describe how two decisive actions by Ingram in his struggle against FAO were motivated and justified by this worldview.

The study of motivations is admittedly very difficult, and one will never know with certainty what the "real" motivations were. In Ingram's case, there is, however, an excellent source for studying Ingram's everyday perceptions and views: his personal diaries. Ingram began to record brief comments on the day's happenings in January 1984 and continued to do so for nearly every day until April 1992, when he left the WFP. The transcripts of the diaries are 698 pages long. They may be accessed at the National Library of Australia in Canberra, with Ingram's prior permission. Some diary entries have been published by Ingram in a 350-page book on his leadership of WFP, which deals—like the diaries—mainly with the conflict with Saouma (Ingram 2007).

### Ingram's First Impressions of Saouma

When Ingram became executive director of the WFP in April 1982, it was already the UN's largest aid-giving agency, delivering food aid from industrialized countries, mostly the U.S., to nearly 100 million beneficiaries in 114 developing countries (Ingram 2007: 14). The UN's food aid arm possessed, however, very little legal, administrative, or financial autonomy. The WFP had been founded, in 1962, as a joint UN/FAO Programme. According to the Programme's General Regulations (GR), which were adopted in 1961 and remained nearly unchanged until 1991, the WFP was to rely "to the fullest extent possible" on FAO's administrative services (GR 14g); its funds were placed under the trusteeship of the FAO director-general (GR 27); its emergency aid projects were approved by the director-general (GR 19); its secretariat was located at FAO headquarters in Rome and was to report to both UN and FAO (GR 7b); and its executive director was appointed jointly by the UN Secretary-General and the FAO Director-General (GR 14b).

In his book, Ingram describes that he carefully read the General Regulations before taking up his appointment. He was aware of the limits to the WFP's autonomy but came to the conclusion that his relationship to Saouma was not "a simple subordinate/superior one

3. Besides the *Society* symposium (Pilon 1988), see e.g., Gill (1986), Abbott (1992: 10–11), Shaw (2001: 211–124), and Stokke, (2009: 271–272).

but rather a constitutional one” (Ingram 2007: 77). In the months before and after his arrival in Rome in April 1982, Ingram gained, however, the impression that Saouma did not respect the constitutional regulations, but instead strived for “complete dominance” over the food organizations (Ingram 2007: 77).

Already, the way in which Saouma had achieved the appointment of Ingram himself made Ingram skeptical. From 1981 to the decision in February 1982, most governments had favored a candidate other than Ingram (2007: 40–42; Shaw 2001: 214). Saouma, however, used his influence on diplomats and governments from the group of developing countries (the G77) to push for the Australian diplomat and director of the Australian Development Assistance Bureau (ADAB), Ingram. Saouma’s success, Ingram writes, gave him a first impression of how Saouma “had come to dominate FAO through his manipulation of the G77” (Ingram 2007: 52).

Ingram’s skepticism of Saouma quickly increased when he met with WFP’s senior staff for individual conversations during his first months in Rome. Ingram gained the impression they were living in a “culture of fear,” including fear of Ingram, who “was perceived as the D-G’s (Director General’s) man” (Ingram 2007: 66). It seemed that Saouma, who had been elected director-general in 1975, had used the intervening years to strengthen his administrative grip over the WFP, creating an atmosphere that not only Ingram but also other WFP senior staff members perceived as detrimental to the efficiency of the food aid agency (Shaw 2001: 211–14; Stokke 2009: 271–72).

The two described episodes—Ingram’s appointment and his meetings with WFP senior staff—exemplify Ingram’s main moral allegations against Saouma: that Saouma manipulated the food organizations’ principals (notably, the G77) and he engaged in reckless bureaucratic politics, particularly vis-à-vis the WFP, to the detriment of the UN’s mission. The following subsection will further elaborate on these two kinds of moral wrong and their role in Ingram’s worldview.

### **Ingram’s Moral Worldview**

In scientific usage, the term “spoiling” does not have an explicit moral meaning. A spoiler is simply he (or she) who counteracts an organization’s official mission—be it peace, agricultural development, or fighting hunger (Trettin and Junk, this issue). Of course, when Stedman describes specific actors as “greedy spoilers” or even as “total spoilers,” who “pursue total power” (Stedman 1997: 7, 9–11), it is hard to ignore the moral connotations. More generally, in research on the internal dynamics of bureaucratic organizations, many terms carry negative moral meanings: agency slack and shirking (Hawkins et al. 2006: 8), the “dark side” (Vaughan 1999), and also bureaucratic politics, which is, according to Allison and Zelikow themselves, an “uncomfortable” conception (1999: 257).

In the case of Ingram’s diaries, these scientific terms—or rather, the phenomena they describe—do carry explicit moral meanings, and describe the two main types of morally reprehensible activities carried out by Saouma and the FAO: agency slack and bureaucratic politics. Agency slack is defined by Hawkins, Lake, Nielson, and Tierney as “independent action by an agent that is undesired by the principal” (Hawkins et al. 2006: 8). In Principal Agent Theory, from which the term is derived, agents are commonly described as opportunistic or “self-interest seeking with guile”—they shirk their obligations where they can and try to maximize their independence (Hawkins et al. 2006: 24). This is exactly how Saouma was depicted by Ingram. He did everything he could to increase his independence from, and influence on, the principals of the FAO, i.e., its member states. Two tools served this purpose: staff appointments, which Saouma used to secure the allegiance of government representatives,<sup>4</sup> and aid requests, in particular requests for WFP emergency food aid.<sup>5</sup> The

4. Ingram, *diaries*, 6.6.84.

5. Ingram, *diaries*, 17.5.84, 24.7.84.

diaries mention, for example, Saouma's "efforts to hold things up" in the case of Ethiopia's June 1984 request and that "we must publicize [that] this was done to punish Ethiopia for [its representative] Negash's support to WFP."<sup>6</sup>

In addition to a quite severe form of agency slack, Saouma was also guilty of pursuing reckless strategies of bureaucratic politics—a form of inner-organizational bargaining behavior that does not serve the organization's mission but one's own turf interests and power base (Allison and Zelikow 1999: chpt. 5). Thus, Ingram records that "everything FAO does is self-serving,"<sup>7</sup> and Saouma was only preoccupied with the chances for his re-election.<sup>8</sup> In Ingram's view, Saouma tried to dismantle every alternative power base within the UN food bureaucracy, in particular the WFP's. When there were, in 1984, allegations of fraud in the tender process for WFP's maritime insurance, Saouma failed to extend the usual fiduciary trust of the "trustee" (the director-general) to his "ward" (the WFP) but instead tried to discredit Ingram's organization.<sup>9</sup>

In Ingram's diaries, the scientific phenomena of agency slack and bureaucratic politics form moral allegations against Saouma. They unmask Saouma as a bureaucratic spoiler, a person who consciously counteracted the UN's mission; they are why Saouma "epitomizes what is wrong" with the UN,<sup>10</sup> and they motivated Ingram's struggle for the independence of his agency, which was, for Ingram, "a struggle of good over bad" and "the test of my life."<sup>11</sup> The motivating, political force of these moral allegations is palpable everywhere in the diaries. It is particularly evident in two crucial actions by Ingram: the decision that led to an unseen, final re-escalation of the FAO-WFP conflict in March 1988, after a period of relative peace, and the speech that decided the final phase of the dispute in December 1990.

### March 1988: The Re-Escalation of the FAO-WFP Conflict

At the beginning of 1988, Ingram was hopeful the relationship between FAO and WFP had entered a more peaceful, stable period based on the May 1985 *Joint UN/FAO Task Force Report*, which had served as a temporary truce in the conflict.<sup>12</sup> The Task Force provisions had allowed WFP to establish its own internal audit, i.e., a unit charged with supervising financial flows and compliance with accountability standards (e.g., travel regulations). Ingram saw this unit as crucial because of his bad experience with FAO's behavior in the maritime insurance affair in 1984, when FAO's internal auditor seemed, in Ingram's perspective, concerned primarily with discrediting the WFP.

In March 1988, the Task Force regulations on WFP's accounting were tested for the first time. The financial accounts for the 1986–87 biennium needed to be prepared (i.e., formal statements that certify that WFP's financial situation is sound), and FAO and WFP staff met for intensive deliberations.<sup>13</sup> FAO requested insight into all kinds of internal audit documents from WFP, because the FAO director-general continued to bear the responsibility for the signature of WFP accounts in his role as "trustee" of the WFP fund. Ingram decided, however, that certain documents would not be submitted to FAO, even though their submission was required by the Task Force report.<sup>14</sup> This decision resulted directly from Ingram's fear of Saouma's spoiling behavior, i.e., Saouma's desire to use a bureaucratic tool intended to create audit

6. Ingram, *diaries*, 2.7.1984.

7. Ingram, *diaries*, 10.2.84.

8. Ingram, *diaries*, 19.6.84.

9. Ingram, *diaries*, 21.5.84; J. Ingram, "Briefing Document Submitted by the Executive Director in Respect of WFP Audited Accounts for 1986–87," 6.4.89, *WFP-Library*, §7.

10. Ingram, *diaries*, 28.1.84.

11. Ingram, *diaries*, 14.6.84.

12. Ingram, *diaries*, 20.1.88.

13. Ingram, *diaries*, 24.3.88, 29.3.88.

14. Ingram, *diaries*, 26.3.88, 29.3.88.

accountability in a highly unaccountable, self-serving way. And this decision resulted directly in the re-escalation of the FAO-WFP conflict. Saouma responded in a manner that Ingram perceived as intransigent and “graceless” and led him to conclude: “This episode (over the accounts) has convinced me that the texts [WFP’s constitutional documents from 1962] must be changed. But how to do it and when?”<sup>15</sup>

The “how” and “when” of WFP’s constitutional independence from FAO turned out to be closely linked to the accounts issue. In the summer of 1988, Saouma refused to sign the 1986–87 accounts since he had not received all the necessary documents.<sup>16</sup> In the fall of 1988, FAO, UN, and WFP governing bodies began to deal with the issue and the allegations of both sides that the other had violated the letter and/or the spirit of the Task Force provisions. The item “WFP audited accounts for 1986–87” remained on committee sessions’ agendas until December 1989. It became the main vehicle of the FAO-WFP confrontation until WFP’s governing committee finally moved, in June 1990, to discuss more generally the issue of the FAO-WFP relationship.<sup>17</sup>

### December 1990: The Decision of the FAO-WFP Conflict

Ingram’s denial of access to internal audit documents, motivated by his fear of Saouma’s use of audit against him and the WFP, had brought the FAO-WFP dispute to a head by the summer of 1990. Many governments began to send unusually high-ranking officials to committee sessions, and an unprecedented number of observers attended. Government representatives had fundamentally different perspectives on the FAO-WFP relationship. Most delegates from donor states described, like Ingram, FAO’s supervision as inefficient, and perceived Saouma as the spoiler. Most delegates from recipient countries stressed, like FAO, the need for FAO’s technical supervision of food aid flows and believed FAO’s assertion that Ingram sought independence merely for his “own benefit.”<sup>18</sup> They believed, in other words, that Ingram was the spoiler. The irreconcilable perspectives deadlocked the negotiations until December 1990, when the WFP’s governing committee finally agreed on a reform package that terminated many of FAO’s oversight rights and gave the WFP secretariat greater legal, financial, and administrative independence, as well as its own headquarters in Rome. This package was adopted by a special session in March 1993 and approved by FAO and UN bodies in the course of 1991.

Why December 1990? Why did Ingram’s arguments that the Task Force provisions were inefficient and that FAO’s insistence on supervision stemmed from self-serving motives not lead to a conclusive action in the fall of 1988, nor in the course of 1989, nor in the summer or fall of 1990? According to Ingram’s own account, the solution of the FAO-WFP conflict was, like its beginnings and its entire course of action, the result of his resistance against Saouma’s mean-spirited spoiling behavior. In the months before December 1990, Saouma’s high-ranking collaborators had assisted the G77 in preparing their own reform proposal that hardly altered the status of the WFP but included a provision that limited the executive director’s terms of office to two.<sup>19</sup> Since Ingram’s second term ended in April 1992, this provision gave the impression that “they [the G77 and Saouma] wanted me [Ingram] to leave.”<sup>20</sup> It seemed indeed that the term limit was “Saouma’s main concern.”<sup>21</sup> Ingram perceived FAO’s lobbying of developing countries as a giant “whispering campaign,” the main thrust of which was that “I was pressing for change to obtain untrammelled power in my next term.”<sup>22</sup>

15. Ingram, *diaries*, 11.4.88.

16. E. Saouma, “Letter to Ingram,” 19.8.88, *FAO-Archives*, FPI/1-Vol. XIV.

17. WFP, “Agenda of the 29th CFA session,” *WFP-Library*.

18. Ingram, *diaries*, 3.12.90.

19. V.J. Shah, “Faaland/WFP,” strictly confidential note to Saouma, 17.5.89, *FAO-Archives*, FPI/1-Vol. XIV.

20. Ingram, *diaries*, 8.10.90.

21. Ingram, *diaries*, 8.10.90.

22. Ingram, *Bread and Stones*, p.283.

In this situation, Ingram made a decision that should prove FAO's campaign wrong and should demonstrate it was not he but Saouma who was the spoiler. On the first day of the WFP governing committee session in December 1990, Ingram declared that he supported the G77's proposal for a term limit and added that "there should be no exceptions; and that therefore any change you make should apply to me."<sup>23</sup> Ingram renounced his own power in order to demonstrate it was not power he was longing for, and, apparently, his renunciation was "very well received by [the] G77" and had the desired "impact on the rival camp."<sup>24</sup> In the early morning of the fourth day of the session, the G77 accepted a package that contained "the essentials of all I [Ingram] sought": wide-ranging financial and administrative independence for the WFP and its executive director.<sup>25</sup>

This section has described how Ingram's perception of Saouma as a greedy spoiler motivated and justified Ingram's struggle for the institutional independence of the WFP from FAO. The next section will examine the motivations and justifications behind Saouma's struggle against WFP's independence.

### **Edouard Saouma's Fight against Spoiling**

*The development issue is above all a moral issue.*

—Edouard Saouma, FAO in the frontline of development, 1993

Was Edouard Saouma indeed a greedy "lord of poverty" (Hancock 1989), acting for no other reason than to protect and expand FAO's turf and further his own power? The task of this section is to make plausible that, while Saouma's behavior might have appeared to others as a case of bureaucratic spoiling, it is better understood as a fight against spoiling. The section will proceed similarly to the section on Ingram. It will assemble as much evidence for Saouma's moral motivations that the contrary assumption—that Saouma was merely driven by greed and was consciously spoiling—becomes implausible. This task is more difficult than that of the last section, because there is neither a diary nor a book about Saouma's struggle against the independence of the WFP. It will thus be necessary to deal with other available sources: a book that Saouma published in the last of his eighteen-year stint as director-general of FAO (1993), in which the conflict is not mentioned; letters and memoranda written by Saouma and his high-ranking collaborators, accessible in the FAO Archives in Rome; interviews with five of Saouma's high-ranking collaborators; the descriptions of observers; and, finally, Ingram's diaries.

The inclusion of Ingram's diaries might come as a surprise. Weren't the diaries the primary basis for demonstrating Saouma was perceived as the spoiler? While Ingram sometimes doubted whether he saw Saouma with "sufficient charity,"<sup>26</sup> such occasional doubt hardly makes it plausible that Saouma did not consciously intend to counteract the UN's mission. Ingram's diaries are important because they provide some first evidence of why Saouma perceived Ingram as a spoiler. The following subsections will first describe Saouma's perceptions of Ingram according to Ingram's own diaries; then Saouma's broader moral worldview; and finally how this worldview motivated Saouma's struggle against WFP's independence.

### **Saouma's Impressions of Ingram According to the Ingram Diaries**

The diaries inform us not only about how Ingram perceived others but also about how others perceived Ingram. Ingram was often confronted with skepticism about the true motivations behind his fight against FAO. In a number of instances, government officials such as the U.S.

23. WFP, "Verbatim Record," 30th CFA session, 1st meeting, *WFP-Library*, p. 9.

24. Ingram, *diaries*, 3.12.1990, 4.12.1990.

25. Ingram, *diaries*, 6.12.1990; WFP, "Report of the 30th CFA session," 4.2.91, *WFP-Library*, pp. 5–8.

26. Ingram, *diaries*, 14.6.84.

Secretary of Agriculture Block described the whole FAO-WFP confrontation as petty and personal to Ingram, which usually led Ingram to stress the issue was “not personal.”<sup>27</sup> The American Ambassador to Rome from 1983 to 1987, former U.S. Representative Millicent Fenwick, once described Ingram and Saouma in the same, negative way: Didn’t both have numbered Swiss bank accounts? At a lunch with Ingram, Fenwick claimed that Ingram was “just as bad as Saouma,” also adding that Ingram would delay aid projects “to influence governments.”<sup>28</sup> The Colombian Ambassador Bula Hoyos—one of Hancock’s sources for allegations against Saouma—even sent a letter to both the secretary-general and the director-general asking them to terminate Ingram’s contract because he was “discrediting the UN.”<sup>29</sup>

Ingram’s diaries also point us to Saouma’s own view of Ingram. Saouma seems to have perceived Ingram as a person longing for untrammelled power not only during the “whispering campaign” of 1990 but already in 1984: “At least twice he [Saouma] has told me [Ingram] that he realized what sort of character I was,” notes Ingram,<sup>30</sup> referring to a conversation with Saouma in which Ingram “spoke cynically” about his own attempts to strengthen governmental oversight. Ingram also supposed that Saouma stood behind U.S. Ambassador Fenwick’s skepticism: “It would appear that she [Fenwick] sees me as [a] power-hungry and ambitious man (Saouma’s view).”<sup>31</sup>

From Ingram’s diaries, we learn that allegations of greed and spoiling existed against almost everybody in the UN food organizations. Ingram himself was suspicious not only of Saouma but also of many government representatives.<sup>32</sup> And the people Ingram dealt with were often suspicious of the motivations behind his behavior as well—a fact that Ingram clearly recognizes and pinpoints in his diaries: “One works so hard to do one’s best but one’s motives are so little understood.”<sup>33</sup> The only people Ingram fully trusted—and who fully trusted Ingram—were those to whom he was linked through a common political struggle: his close collaborators. It is worth quoting more fully from Ingram’s diary entry on the “struggle of good over bad”: “I write these words [i.e., good over bad] hesitantly. One’s own motives are always obscure and perhaps I do not view Saouma and his cohorts with sufficient charity. All I can say is that good men like [names of four collaborators] give unstinting support.”<sup>34</sup>

How about “Saouma and his cohorts,” then? In six interviews with five of Saouma’s close collaborators (of over seven hours’ duration in sum), all of them expressed their unstinting support of Saouma. In particular, they described Saouma as an upright, moral character who truly cared for FAO’s mission and wanted to help the poor in developing countries. “As far as I’m concerned,” one of them said, “Saouma was all about development, he dedicated his life to it.”<sup>35</sup> And this is indeed the impression one gains when reading through Saouma’s 1993 report on his leadership of FAO. The recurring theme that runs through the 184 pages of Saouma’s book is the idea that FAO has a crucial role to play in north-south relations.

### Saouma’s Moral Worldview

Saouma was elected FAO director-general in 1975, a time when developing countries’ demands for a new international economic order were high on the agenda. One of Saouma’s first initiatives was a radical restructuring of FAO’s budget, to reduce staff and headquarters expenses and free up money for development projects in recipient countries (Saouma 1993:

27. Ingram, *diaries*, 9.7.84.

28. Ingram, *diaries*, 5.6.84, 6.6.84.

29. Ingram, *diaries*, 6.6.84.

30. Ingram, *diaries*, 6.6.84.

31. Ingram, *diaries*, 29.5.84.

32. Ingram, *diaries*, 6.6.84.

33. Ingram, *diaries*, 14.5.84.

34. Ingram, *diaries*, 14.6.84.

35. Interview, 20.9.2011.

15–20; Talbot and Moyer 1987: 354). Media reports from the first years in office depict Saouma as a dynamic leader, willing to take radical, concrete measures to advance FAO's mission.<sup>36</sup> Saouma was re-elected unopposed in October 1981. However, in the following years, FAO ran into substantial problems. And 1981 was also the first year of Ronald Reagan's presidency, and the U.S. began to take an increasingly tough stance vis-à-vis the UN system, to the point of withdrawing from UNESCO, which was led at the time by Amadou M'Bow, another advocate of the global south who was depicted as a greedy and corrupt spoiler (Coate 1989). The U.S. also began to withhold parts of its statutory financial contributions to certain UN agencies and from 1986 onwards, from FAO (Saouma 1993: 131).

In Saouma's analysis, the U.S.'s breach of FAO's statutes epitomized what was wrong with the UN system: industrialized countries' shirking from their obligations to developing countries. In *Principal Agent Literature*, "shirking" is defined as a form of agency slack; it occurs "when an agent minimizes the effort it exerts on its principal's behalf" (Hawkins et al. 2006: 8). In his 1993 report, Saouma uses the term to describe the U.S.'s lack of effort in meeting its legal and moral commitments to the formerly colonized countries of the global south (Saouma 1993: 143).

Saouma openly criticized the policies of Western, industrialized countries in his speeches: inequitable terms of trade, protectionism, and agricultural surpluses resulting from subsidies.<sup>37</sup> Also present on this list was the Western support for Ingram's fight for institutional independence, which FAO's leadership perceived as a self-interested quest for control of food aid streams. Saouma often stressed "food aid programmes should be designed to solve the problems of the recipients, not those of the donors,"<sup>38</sup> and he argued food aid risked becoming "an end in itself" if FAO's oversight over the WFP was terminated.<sup>39</sup> These concerns were not implausible. Researchers have stressed that "the United States has always employed food aid in the service of short-term self-interested goals related to surplus disposal, export market promotion, and geopolitical strategy" (Barrett and Maxwell 2005: 50).

Ingram's struggle for independence was perceived by FAO's leadership as morally illegitimate—as a case of spoiling or counteracting the UN's mission in the pursuit of self-interested goals. In interviews, senior collaborators of Saouma directed allegations of spoiling against Ingram's Western allies but also against Ingram himself. Ingram's main fault was he, in a sense, "sold out" the WFP to the United States. In the view of both former FAO and WFP staff, institutional independence led to an increase of U.S. influence over the food aid program. And indeed, since Ingram's departure in 1992, all executive directors have been U.S. nationals, whereas before there were none, apart from one three-month exception.<sup>40</sup> A collaborator of Saouma reasoned that Ingram collaborated with the "extremely reactionary, right-wing, entrenched State Department" in the time of Assistant Secretary of State for International Organization Affairs John Bolton (1989–93) because he was aware of the WFP's dependence on American contributions.<sup>41</sup> As the same collaborator put it, Ingram became a "servant of the United States agricultural policy."<sup>42</sup> He served the interests of one powerful principal and, thereby, neglected his responsibility to the collective principal of the UN, the community of member states.

In internal documents, FAO staff members depicted Ingram as a bureaucratic politician obsessed with independence. They complained about "the extreme offensive tone of

36. E.g., New York Times, "U.N. Food Agency Says Few Gains Have Been Made Against Hunger," 3.1.1978.

37. E. Saouma, "Statement to the 23rd CFA session," 25.5.1987, *WFP-Library*, pp. 3–4; E. Saouma, "Statement to the 14th CFA session," 11.10.1982, *WFP-Library*, pp. 2–3.

38. Saouma, "Statement to the 23rd CFA session," p. 5.

39. E. Saouma, "Draft Letter to B.R. Sen," undated/Nov.90, *FAO-Archives*, FP1/11.

40. Thomas Robinson, acting executive director from May 1976 to June 1977 and executive director from July 1977 to September 1977.

41. Interview, 20.9.2011.

42. Interview, 20.9.2011.

Ingram's correspondence,<sup>343</sup> his complete neglect of reporting requirements to FAO<sup>44</sup> and his aggressive "pressuring" of a FAO expert group,<sup>45</sup> even angrily noting on Ingram's letters: "I fail to see the logic!"<sup>46</sup> According to the moral logic of the FAO leadership around Saouma, Ingram was the person guilty of agency slack (in his alliance with a single principal, the U.S.) and reckless bureaucratic politics (because of his obsession with the expansion of WFP's turf).

### **Saouma's Resistance against the Independence of the WFP**

The battles of the FAO-WFP conflict gain a different moral dimension when one looks at them from the viewpoint of FAO's leadership. In interviews, FAO officials described the December 1990 "package deal" as the result of threats by industrialized countries and the WFP management to cut food aid to governments supportive of FAO. They said Ingram renounced power in order to clear the way for an American, and they claimed Ingram's specific acts of contestation of FAO oversight stemmed from a selfish obsession with institutional independence.<sup>47</sup> Against this background, Saouma's actions against Ingram appeared not as a case of spoiling but as a morally legitimate struggle to safeguard the UN's mission. The different moral meaning of Saouma's actions—the different moral-political answer to the spoiler question—is palpable in interviews, speeches, and internal documents, and it also applies to the very beginnings of the FAO-WFP confrontation: Saouma's attitude toward the WFP secretariat in the first years after his election in 1975.

As described in the first section, some WFP staff members experienced Saouma's behavior in the first years as an expression of a manipulative desire for complete dominance. But according to Saouma's collaborators, Saouma was trying to limit the U.S.'s influence on the UN's food aid agency. Saouma made a number of personnel decisions that seem to have deeply angered the United States. He confirmed the appointment of the acting WFP executive director in 1976/77, U.S. national Thomas Robinson, only three months before his retirement in September 1977, and then appointed a Canadian to follow Robinson. In 1981, he broke the long-standing tradition of the FAO's deputy director-general being an American by appointing Edward West from the UK. And in 1982, he pressed for Ingram's appointment to the post of executive director, disregarding the U.S. nomination (Shaw 2001: 214). In Ingram's report, Saouma is quoted with an early remark about his hope that Ingram would be "quite strong, enough to stand up to donor pressure" (Ingram 2007: 53). Ingram, however, proved strong enough to resist Saouma's pressure and instead moved closer to the donors.

Saouma's resistance to Ingram's quest for independence was possible because Saouma could justify this resistance as an action against a greedy spoiler. When Ingram denied the FAO audit team insight into internal documents in March 1988, Saouma at first accepted Ingram's decision but told him: "I don't like your fait accompli, pressure tactics."<sup>48</sup> In August 1988, Saouma refused to certify the WFP accounts, because, as he argued, Ingram had violated the Task Force provisions and his obligations to WFP's constitutional principal: the FAO.<sup>49</sup> This line of argument can be found in both public and confidential documents that FAO's leadership produced in the years from 1988 to 1990. In fact, in reading the historical documents, it seems the responsible FAO officials did nothing but constantly justify their bureaucratic measures against Ingram in moral-bureaucratic terms. Thus efforts of moral justification filled the days of both FAO and WFP managers—the protracted bureaucratic struggle was only possible because it could be justified, on both sides, as a struggle against a greedy spoiler.

43. DM, "Proposed Director-General's reply to Ingram's letter," 1.2.89, *FAO-Archives*, FPI/1-Vol.XIV.

44. K. Mehboob, "Strictly Confidential Note to the Director-General," 12.1.89, *FAO-Archives*, FPI/1-Vol.XIV.

45. V.J. Shah, "Faaland/WFP," strictly confidential note to Saouma, 17.5.89, *FAO-Archives*, FPI/1-Vol.XIV.

46. R. Joseph, hand-written comment on a letter from Ingram, 18.5.89, *FAO-Archives*, FPI/1-Vol.XIV.

47. Interviews, 23.5.2012, 25.5.2012, 21.5.2012, 20.9.2011, 15.9.2011.

48. Ingram, *diaries*, 31.3.88.

49. Saouma, "Letter to Ingram," 19.8.88, *FAO-Archives*, FPI/1-Vol. XIV.

## Conclusion

The disagreement in the social science journal *Society* over whether the FAO Director-General Edouard Saouma was a bureaucratic spoiler corresponds to a broader, political disagreement over who acted against the UN's mission in the 1980s world food organizations. For the WFP Executive Director James Ingram, Saouma epitomized what was wrong with the UN system. Saouma was guilty of a long list of bureaucratic wrongs: He ignored and manipulated member states' control mechanisms and engaged in typical, reckless bureaucratic politics, handing out posts for political reasons and manipulating the approval of emergency aid requests to enhance his and FAO's power base. Saouma was, for Ingram, a bureaucratic spoiler who consciously counteracted the UN's mission, and this is why, from Ingram's perspective, the struggle for the institutional independence of the WFP was morally legitimate, and even more than that, morally necessary.

On the other side of the FAO-WFP conflict, the world followed a different moral logic. For Saouma and the FAO leadership, the danger to the UN's moral mission originated not from their own quest for power but from Ingram's opportunism and the U.S.'s reckless pursuit of self-interest. According to Saouma and his close collaborators, Ingram and the U.S. administration had violated their legal and moral obligations to pay their statutory contributions (in the case of the U.S.) and to loosen the WFP's bond to the FAO, e.g., by disrespecting reporting requirements (in the case of Ingram). In the view of FAO's leadership, Ingram and his allies, notably the conservative U.S. administrations under Reagan and Bush, were guilty of typical bureaucratic wrongs: spoiling, shirking, and egoistic bureaucratic politics.

What lessons can be drawn from this analysis for future research? At first, the findings of this study point to a problem with a certain kind of research project. If the primary goal of scientific inquiry is to model and define "agency slack," "shirking," "bureaucratic politics," or other forms of bureaucratic spoiling, then research might encounter situations in which the scientific questions—what is agency slack or spoiling, and who engages in such activities?—are political questions. In such situations, for example, in the nine-year conflict between the FAO and the WFP, it might not be possible to determine in an entirely objective and neutral manner what kind of behavior truly was a case of agency slack and who the spoiler was truly. This problem is a real limit to research, because it originates not only from the possible political bias of historical sources. It is rather a consequence of the deeper moral-political structures of such conflicts, in which certain questions have no definitive, objective, and rational answer (cf. Williams 1973).

The moral-political character of different "spoiler" concepts—such as agency slack or bureaucratic politics—is not only a limit, but also a potential for future research. To realize this potential requires a change in the direction of research. Instead of trying to develop abstract definitions and categories of spoilers and their actions (agency slack, etc.), it will be necessary to examine the different definitions that exist in real-world institutions. Instead of deciding who the spoilers are, it will be necessary to examine allegations of "spoiling" and their justifications. Instead of using "bureaucratic politics" as an empirical concept of purely analytical value, it will be necessary to treat it as a normative concept with tremendous political implications.

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