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Twilight Food Networks: Community Kitchens as a Response to Food Poverty in Southern England

Declaration of original authorship

I confirm that this is my own work and the use of all material from other sources has been properly and fully acknowledged.

Sabine Mayeux

Abstract

This thesis is about the networked response to growing food poverty in the UK where one in five is estimated to experience concerns with running out of food, or not eating enough. In this context, an increasing number of private, local, grassroots groups and institutions have taken the initiative to set up food aid provision in the urban landscape, in addition to food banks, and operate as part of what I have I coined 'Twilight Food Networks' (TFNs). Community kitchens have been set up by the public to serve food and to offer other essentials to individuals who cannot purchase food as regularly as they would like, or for those who cannot access or afford any food at all, even via food banks. These kitchens or local food initiatives are situated 'outside' the formalised public or charitable emergency food banking system. Drawing on the anti-hunger movement literature and food studies, this dissertation positions community initiatives within the 'second generation' of Alternative Food Networks (AFNs) that address wider political food system pressures, and in this project, to questions of food justice, food poverty at the local level and the feeding of increasingly marginalised populations. This thesis draws on ethnographic and participatory research using a wide range of methods including netnography, participant observation as well as interviews conducted at various food handouts in the South of England. Data collection spanned from over a three-year period, from 2017 to 2020 in the town of Reading and surroundings where numerous charities serve food and non-food items to vulnerable individuals. Two theoretical and conceptual approaches underpin this research project, the first being food justice and the second care ethics. Findings suggest that community kitchens are relational spaces of care that take responsibility for those in food poverty and seek to address injustices by offering hopeful and progressive possibilities. Such an approach counters criticism that pertains to emergency food aid providers with regards to their actions towards immediate hunger relief, rather than against the root causes of food poverty. Findings further indicate that public-led initiatives within the TFNs are a catalyst for public engagement aimed at reducing hunger and poverty in the Global North, and therefore, can play a central role in efforts aimed at reducing various social injustices, including those that are food related.

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I must thank food and poverty scholars who led the way so that students like me could put our social research skills to – or so I hope – good use by building on their work. The late Professor Paul Cloke's numerous publications on charitable activities that care for the marginalised greatly inspired my own approach to the study of food aid. In this thesis, I have sought to argue in favour of a nuanced approach to food poverty by showing that networked caring in the form of public-led initiatives can be a force for good. What I analysed is not a radical transformation in food systems and socio-economic factors, but it is a window into what is possible when people come together to alter what they deem unjust. While an imperfect and ephemeral response, ordinary citizens' engagement within the Twilight Food Networks constitutes an immediate and real-world answer to growing insecurities, more so in (post-)covid times and in view of current geopolitics.

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Tables and Figures

Glossary

AFNs	Alternative Food Networks. Agri-food structures set up in resistance to mainstream food systems in an attempt to reclaim control in some aspects of the food system. In this dissertation, emergency food aid providers are located within second generation AFNs, a subgroup of practices that creatively seek to reshape agri-food chains for greater equity
Commissioned service	Local support service funded by public authorities that deliver a range of service, for instance homelessness prevention support systems or rough sleeper outreach, both of which are relevant to this dissertation
Community fridge	Fridges or pantries popularised in Berlin by a volunteer-led organisation in 2012 to promote peer-to-peer community food saving and sharing with the purpose of saving and redistributing perfectly good food that would otherwise go to waste
Community kitchen	Registered charities or informal groups of volunteers that serve food in brick-and-mortar locations, principally aimed at economically marginalised individuals. These are emergency food providers that enable people to communally prepare and eat their meals. The terms 'community kitchen', 'kitchen', 'service', 'initiative', 'handout' and 'provider' are interchangeable in this thesis, to avoid redundance
DWP	UK Department for Work and Pensions. Service that oversees the annual Family Resource Survey to which questions that pertain to UK food insecurity in the last thirty days have been added since 2019
FareShare	The UK's longest-running surplus food redistribution charity. Redistribution centres are warehouses that store and distribute foodstuffs to authorised non-profit organizations that provide assistance to those in need
FBO	Faith-based organisation. Group of individuals united on the basis of religious or spiritual beliefs to serve the community. The majority of community kitchens are FBOs

Food bank	Warehouses that collect, store donations of surplus food that is either directly redistributed to people in need, or indirectly via other organisations, such as community kitchens. Food banks are the most visible emergency food aid providers. While the Trussell Trust is the largest network of food banks in the UK, smaller independent groups of food banks operate under different rules and may not always require referrals, for instance. Current estimates suggest around 800 independent food banks operate across the UK
Foodbank	Official term for the Trussell Trust food banks. The largest nationwide network is coordinated by the Trussell Trust, a charity founded on Christian principles in 2000 that has over 400 'foodbanks' in the UK
Food justice	Framework that addresses inequalities across the agri-food systems by situating the latter within broader power privilege relations. In this dissertation, community initiatives contribute to more equitable food systems by tending to the needs of the economically marginalised
Food poverty	Used synonymously with food insecurity in this thesis. Refers to a situation that is complex to define and measure. In surveys, questions pertain to whether a person has ever run out of money for food, and if so, how often, and how they acquire food in any given amount of time, typically in the last thirty days. Service users are deemed food insecure
Food surplus	Food that is still suitable for consumption and re-purposed via food aid providers, including food banks. Conversely, food waste is produced along the food chain and at the household level and refers to food that is discarded
Homeless or rough sleeper	Loosely defines a person who lives on the streets with nowhere to go at night. Invisible homelessness is more complex to measure because it concerns various living arrangements among the housing insecure: squatters in derelict buildings not designed for habitation, people who stay with friends or family for lack of funds, live in a hostel, sleep in night shelters, etc
IFAN	Independent Food Aid Network. An alliance of independent, grassroots food aid providers working together since May 2016 to ensure national representation of independent food aid providers including food banks

KL	Kitchen Leader. Typically refers to a volunteer who sets up, runs a TFN charity and/or helps organise individual sessions. Kitchen leaders can also be one of the few paid members of staff employed by a charity. Interchangeable with session leader
Soup kitchen	Historical concept that refers to an institution where free or low-priced soup was served to the unemployed. It now refers to emergency free food providers to low-income, high-needs users but it holds a negative connation. Occasionally synonymous with 'soup run'
Soup run	Mobile service that distributes cooked and non-perishable food in the streets, aimed principally at homeless people
SU	Service User. Individual who attends TFN food handouts in this thesis. More generally, the term 'service user' refers to someone who relies on local support services for housing, food, and other necessities. Trussell Trust foodbanks typically say 'client' whereas independent food banks and FBOs may prefer to use 'guest' or 'friend'
TFNs	Twilight Food Networks. In this thesis, TFNs is a coined term for community-led food charities that operate within emergency food systems, denoting mostly civil society endeavours initiated by the public to alleviate food insecurity. Food banks are excluded from the TFNs
UC	Universal Credit. Following the Welfare Reform Act 2012, the UK government's new welfare program gradually replaced six existing benefits - Income Support, income-based Jobseeker's Allowance, income-related Employment Support Allowance, Housing Benefit, Working Tax Credit and Child Tax Credit - under a single system to be applied for online

Adapted from this thesis' research findings as well as Caraher and Furey, 2017, Cloke et al., Dowler, 2002, Garthwaite, 2016, Hughes, 2011; Kneafsey et al., 2021, Power et al., 2017 and Shelter, 2005.

Chapter One. Introduction

1. Background to study

Food is a necessary life-sustaining requirement for all living creatures. Therefore, what we define as food holds a central place in society and this is deeply implicated in various societal challenges including climate change, hunger, chronic illnesses, malnutrition, rural decline and social inequality. One of the key task for 21st century food policy, given these ongoing and accelerating concerns, is to feed people in an appropriate, sustainable and equitable way (Lang et al., 2009, p.253). Lack of food manifests itself in a variety of forms such as food poverty, food insecurity, malnutrition, social injustice and market failure, all of which have 'hunger' and 'injustices' as central issues.

A 2017 survey commissioned by the UK Government's Food Standards Agency indicated that 8% of adults in England, Wales, and Northern Ireland—approximately 4 million people—experienced insufficient access to food due to lack of income in the last twelve months. A further 13% of adults indicated more moderate insecure food access: that is, they could not afford balanced meals and/or they worried about food running out or had experienced food scarcity in the recent past (FSA, 2017). Since April 2019, the Department for Work and Pensions has measured household food poverty using additional questions to the Family Resource Survey. In the survey, households are considered food secure when they have access to sufficient, varied food to facilitate an active and healthy lifestyle (DWP, 2021a). In addition, findings from data collected in the financial year 2019-20 show that 87% of households were food secure with 8% reporting low to very low household food security, which means they had had their eating patterns disrupted due to insufficient resources or money for food. The 2021 UK Food Security Report published by the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs examines various trends related to food security as set out by the Agriculture Act 2020, including issues of affordability and access to food, or household-level food security (DEFRA, 2021). Since the first assessment of UK's Food Security in 2009, numerous events had an impact of the country's food security landscape, most notably Brexit, climate change and the Covid-19 pandemic. With the 2021 report only tracking trends up to the financial year 2020, data depicting the precise impact of the pandemic are not available as of yet. However, the

report ascertains the adverse effects of increased prices for certain categories of food, along with growth in expenditures for housing, transport and recreation on household budgets, especially on the poorest 20% of UK households whose income has decreased since 2017 (DEFRA, 2021, p. 208).

In addition to these official sources of date collection on food poverty, data collected by the largest network of foodbanks[1] in the UK, the Trussell Trust, provide a useful overview of the food insecure who seek formal assistance. The previously named Food Security report recognises the lack of a 'comprehensive record of the number of organisations providing food aid in the UK' due to food aid's diversity (DEFRA, 2021, p. 210) therefore, the best estimates of foodbank aid users lie with the Trussell Trust whose foodbanks are required to keep track of their operations. Accordingly, the most recent data collected by the networked foodbank provider indicated that the numbers of food parcels given out during the year ending 31th of March 2021 increased by 33% on the previous year, or by a 128% increase on five years ago (The Trussell Trust, 2021). These statistics clearly highlight the growing demand for emergency food since the start of the Covid-19 pandemic in March 2019. However, they also demonstrate that the demand for food banks had been steadily growing in pre-Covid years and that this demand was simply made more visible when the pandemic led to a loss of income and further hardship for more individuals and families. In their introduction to a special issue to the *European Journal of Cultural Studies* on digital food cultures, Zeena Feldman and Michael Goodman (2021) suggest that the pandemic has worsened inequalities around food and altered practices around accessing, preparing and consuming food. These changes have had uneven impacts on the population, notably by shifting 'culinary sociality', that is, how and where eating occurs, especially for some people who have had to turn to food banks and other emergency food aid providers (Feldman and Goodman, 2021, p.1231).

While this present study does not focus on food banks, data collected about food banks by the Trussell Trust provide a relatively[2] reliable proxy for gauging the extent of food poverty in the UK. Food banks are typically praised in the media and elsewhere even though criticism reflects the widespread feeling that food banks in the UK have become the 'new normal'

[1] The Trussell Trust employs the term 'foodbank' whereas 'food bank' is used more generally for emergency food aid, and in particular, the food banking system (Garthwaite, 2016, p.163).

[2] Data from Trussell Trust have been contested for not capturing the 'true scale of food poverty' (Garratt et al., 2016, p.2) seeing that people seek food assistance elsewhere. This point will be discussed in the literature review.

(O'Hara, 2017) and that this new normal has led to a similar situation to that of the United States where emergency food assistance in the form of food banks have 'taken on the institutionalized role of a social-welfare agency' (Husbands, 1999, p.109). A recent paper by Beck and Gwilym (2022) compares food banks to the default 'charitable safety net for those who have been failed by the social security system in times of austerity and during the Covid-19' pandemic'. They write of the normalisation of a 'charitable food banking landscape' as shown by the prevalence of Trussell Trust foodbanks that respond to food poverty throughout the UK. Their concern pertains specifically to Trussell Trust foodbanks, rather than universal social security provision, having become the 'recognized embedded provider' that responds to increasing vulnerability in the UK (Beck and Gwilym, 2022).

Accordingly, many critical food scholars and UK-based food poverty movements see food banks as an inadequate answer to the problems of hunger unless they reconstruct themselves as 'antihunger organizations' to ensure that they do not only provide traditional emergency food programs, but also enter public policy debates on hunger. Indeed, the problems associated with the normalised embeddedness of food charities within American civil society has been further highlighted by Andrew Fisher (2017, p. 262), whose experience in the anti-hunger field as the executive director of national and local food groups has led him to the conclusion that these 'anti-hunger organizations' have 'become part of a 'hunger industrial complex' that seems as self-perpetuating as the more famous military-industrial complex. Reliant on corporate donations of food and money, anti-hunger organizations have helped shape the 'emergency food system' in the US into an industry and maintain the status-quo for businesses by diverting attention away from an important driver of hunger: economic inequality driven by low wages and, especially in the UK, the recent shrinking and complex bureaucracy of a much reduced welfare state (Caraher and Furey, 2018).

In this context in the UK, an increasing number of private, local, grassroots groups and institutions have taken the initiative to set up community organisations that serve food to individuals who cannot access food as regularly as they would like, or who cannot access or afford any food at all, even via food banks. In the UK these local food initiatives are situated 'outside' the formalised public/charity emergency food system of food banks, yet they are still located within emergency food systems given that their primary function is to alleviate immediate hunger. Further, these initiatives are considered 'second generation' Alternative

Food Networks (AFNs) that address wider political food system pressures, as defined by Kneafsey et al. (2021), and in this dissertation, questions of food justice and food poverty at the local level. In response to what might be referred to as a growing gap in food provisioning between formalised emergency food provisioning with the widespread of food banking and the more conventional food economy, in the UK there has been the rapid rise and spread of what are variously called community or collective 'kitchens' designed to feed these poor, marginalised and vulnerable populations. Charitable and civil responses to food insecurity is not a new phenomenon in the UK and elsewhere as community support has long existed for those in need, but the novelty in the past decade lies in the increase and ongoing demand for emergency food provision 'from people with nowhere to turn' (Dowler, 2014, p.170).

Community responses in the form of community kitchens - which are the focus of this dissertation - very often involve small groups of individuals who come together to cook large quantities of food, the times and locations of which often vary or change rapidly (Engler-Stringer and Berenbaum, 2005). Additionally, kitchens are variously attached to faith or secular community groups of differing organisation structures and/or sizes. As Iakovou et al. (2012, p. 542) have argued, there is evidence that community kitchens may 'prevent food insecurity through reducing social isolation, improving food and cooking skills and empowering participants' with their description of these novel community food access providers emphasising the social and nutritional health supporting abilities of these kitchens, along with their aptness at tackling concerns around food insecurity.

Community kitchens are occasionally termed 'soup kitchens', 'soup runs', 'food providers' or 'food handouts'. Importantly, they are not food banks as they offer more than emergency food parcels and typically welcome any person in need of food, irrespective of their situation. Also, they do not include community or surplus cafés that operate on a donation basis, pay as you feel or that provide low-cost meals. Rather, typically, these 'community-focused kitchens' emphasise the communal aspects of food preparation and the act of eating. Meals might be cooked from scratch or assembled on site by volunteers, who are invited to share the meal with service users or 'guests' who have come along to eat the prepared food on site and/or collect surplus food and other necessities such as toiletries. In addition, as will be shown in more detail later, community food aid by way of these kitchens proposes a kind of free 'conviviality' to low income, high-needs individuals in the form of daily or weekly social

connection or further connection to other types of social and/or institutional support. For example, as stated in the homeless charity Shelter's (2005, p. 15) report on the operation of soup runs, these encounters are 'the starting point for a broader range of opportunities for engagement and help'. Shelter differentiates between soup runs and other mechanisms of food distribution, such as food parcels that are not specifically aimed at rough sleepers or at individuals excluded from other services. However, the food aid initiatives discussed in this dissertation refer to a variety of handouts that operate indoors and outdoors, or more recently due to Covid-19, parcels that are handed out directly to individuals to maintain social distancing and work in accordance with Government Covid-19 guidelines. The homelessness charity Shelter offers an overwhelmingly favourable view of soup kitchens despite criticism from mainstream agencies for whom food aid provides a poorly targeted service and, worse, encourages complacency among the homeless who might choose to stay on the streets rather than seek accommodation, as exposed in a 2005 report. For example, the then chief executive of the homelessness charity Thames Reach, is said to have complained about handouts because rather than offer a temporary solution, they enable their clients to stay in the streets for years (Shelter, 2005, p.12). As stated in the Shelter report (2005, p. 18) soup kitchens have been criticised for allowing 'the continuation of a damaging street lifestyle', and for being 'crime hotspots', giving rise to complaints about litter, noise and imitation in city centres. To such criticism, the charity responded that it was incorrect to suggest soup-run users chose an 'easier' life by staying on the streets because if anything, handouts made life more bearable for the entrenched rough sleepers, given them a purpose even when they came off the streets. Regarding nuisance, Shelter suggested that handouts cause no more nuisance than pubs and fast-food outlets and furthermore, the real issue lies with the presence of soup runs in city centres as a uncomfortable reminder of food poverty, social exclusion, and homelessness that the public prefers to ignore. Shelter (2005, p. 19) concluded with the following:

> Turning to street homelessness, there is no evidence to suggest that the availability of small amounts of free food is a major reason why people remain on the streets. This is more likely to be related to the use of drugs and alcohol and a lack of suitable accommodation and support options. Indeed, run well and coordinated, soup-runs can and do play an important role in enabling people to begin to exit homelessness.

Therefore, an important function of community kitchens and more recent food parcel services during the pandemic pertains to their crucial role in providing vital nutrition to those subject to food poverty in the short and long term.

Emergency food aid has also come under scrutiny in academic circles because it is seen as an inadequate response to hunger. In the United States, Janet Poppendieck has long criticised food programs for providing sub-standard food, for being ephemeral and insufficient in tackling hunger, and for relying on an unstable system of charitable donations and volunteer labour (Poppendieck, 1999). Crucially, for Poppendieck as well as Valerie Tarasuk (2001), the charitable food system has enabled the state to absolve itself from any responsibility towards its citizens when it comes to ensuring that all can access food in socially acceptable ways. In high income countries more generally, Rachel Loopstra (2018a) emphasises that food banks and community-level interventions to reduce household insecurity provide limited assistance to those in need, and do not always reach individuals who need help the most. In the UK, Chris Möller (2019; 2022) has faulted supermarkets and food charities for turning food poverty into a spectacle, and in so doing, Möller questions charities' role in the institutionalisation of corporate food aid. Following the work of Andy Fisher (2019) on the usefulness of food charity in corporate partnerships, Möller (2019) condemns the 'spectacle of charity' whereby:

> social problems are made into marketable opportunities and positive experiences to be consumed. Poverty relief becomes a commodity when vast displays of donated food serve to reassure us that hunger can be tackled and the poor are taken care of by generous givers and kind volunteers. While charity is made more visible across spectacular events and social media, this changes how we get to see, experience, and fight poverty.

Möller's (2022, p.3) more recent work offers a critical perspective on the growing network of charities, corporates and advice partners that address food poverty, and the food banks that implement 'more than food' programmes as a means to provide more 'holistic care'. His critique does not concern volunteers and charities, but, following Michel Foucault, the regimes of truth that surround, frame and govern food poverty discourse and praxis. Here, then, the problem lies in food banks being framed as an adequate solution to poverty in view of a retreating welfare state, thus normalising market-based solutions which further contributes to poverty relief made into a commodity requiring more of everything to be sustained: 'virtuous volunteers', 'generous donors' and 'worthy poors' (Möller, 2022, p.31). Sabine Goodwin from the Independent Food Aid Network (IFAN)[3] further criticises 'what was

[3] The Independent Food Aid Network is an alliance that offers free membership to UK-based independent food aid providers who share the charity's vision 'of a country without the need for charitable food aid and in which good food is accessible to all' (IFAN, 2022). IFAN's quantification of food aid providers will be discussed in the literature review as a valuable insight into the extent of charitable food provisioning in the UK.

only [a] sticking plaster response to food poverty' prior to the Covid-19 pandemic, and how vulnerable people relied even more on charity food supplies and donations during lockdowns. For IFAN members, an emergency food response such as the redistribution of surplus food via food banks and parcels is an inadequate solution to hunger (Goodwin, 2020). Numerous scholars hold similar views (e.g. Garthwaite, 2016; Lambie-Mumford, 2014; Riches, 2011; Poppendieck, 1997), however, this thesis takes a different perspective and approach to community food kitchens: community initiatives are neither a solution to growing food poverty nor a long-term acceptable remedy to injustices in the food system. Rather, community food initiatives are seen as endeavours that feed people 'in the meantime' (Cloke et al., 2016), enable social advocacy for volunteers and stakeholders, and importantly, that strengthen communities through an ethics of care.

2. Research aims and questions

This thesis aims to explore three main areas of analysis across its three empirical chapters:

1. How community kitchens alleviate immediate hunger and food poverty through the empirical cases of community kitchens in southern England and predominantly Reading;
2. How citizens have responded to growing poverty, inequalities and injustices in the food system; and
3. How transformative food politics occur through community empowerment and acts of caring.

To explore and analyse these three areas, this thesis is organised into three empirical chapters intended for publication as separate papers. Thus, while the thesis does contain a longer literature review (Chapter Two), the discussion of research design and methodology is in the Introduction (Chapter One) as well as embedded in each chapter, along with a shorter discussion of the specific literature and debates each chapter is situated within.

Chapter Three discusses and analyses community empowerment through the study of networked charitable initiatives that I call in this thesis the 'Twilight Food Network' (TFN) that operates as spaces of care and enables greater food justice, albeit in a very ephemeral social

and material sense. It further considers the place of charitable initiatives in second generation AFNs and works to contribute to debates on AFNs, food poverty, food justice and the rise of voluntary, community organisations in light of austerity and Covid-19. In particular, the novel notion of the TFN offers a new and important conceptual tool to understand what has happened and is continuing to happen across UK foodscapes with respect to austerity, food aid and the deepening 'cost of living crisis' taking hold in our expanding post-Covid times.

Chapter Four evaluates how community food projects use digital platforms to run their service, promote their work and create links with wide-ranging partners; this is the first research that explores and analyses the ways community food projects use, contribute to and make up key aspects of the digital foodscape. The use of social media is instrumental to the activities of charitable food initiatives because it constitutes an affordable and immediate means to communicate with the public, volunteers, and service users. It follows that social media matters to this project given its central role in not only promoting the work of these initiatives but in enabling them to execute aforesaid work in the community. Beyond the usefulness of social media for charities, the ways the latter interact on social media affect how the public might conceptualise, experience, and address food insecurity through volunteering or others forms of advocacy. One of the key findings here is that these organisations operating in Reading had to 'go digital to become real': The local council required these organisations to establish a digital presence on the internet and on social media in order for them to be deemed 'viable enough' to speak to and get funding from the local council. This chapter contributes the growing debates around 'digital food cultures' (Lupton, 2020), 'digital foodscapes' (Goodman and Jaworska, 2020) and 'virtual reconnection' (Bos and Owen, 2016) in poverty and food justice food networks. Importantly, digital food activism in TFNs may play an important role in efforts aimed at greater social justice. It follows that the online engagement of community kitchens may act as a catalyst for greater public interest in issues that affect marginalised individuals and those on low income.

Using a mix of short ethnography, participant observation and participatory action research, **Chapter Five** considers the modes by which academics study community food projects and the role of the scholar-activist in participatory food research and participatory action research more broadly. The second aim of the thesis is explored in this chapter since interest in food poverty is governed by a desire to address social injustices and/or other concerns with the

food system. This chapter contributes to debates on scholar activism within human geography and food studies (Sandover, 2020) and specifically on those working towards and analysing questions of food justice in the UK (Dowler, 2014; Kneafsey et al., 2017; Moragues-Faus, 2017).

A fuller chapter synopsis is provided at the end of this chapter.

3. The theoretical and conceptual approaches: food justice and care ethics

Two theoretical and conceptual approaches underpin this research project. The first is related to questions of food justice and the second is care ethics. Food justice emphasises equity in ways food is produced, distributed and consumed, and offers an alternative approach to the dominant food system (Gottlieb and Joshi, 2013). Its aim is to build a transformative food movement where food is used as a tool to achieve social justice and change, given that 'justice in terms of food is co-constitutive with many other drives for justice, whether cultural, political, economic, social or environmental' (Herman et al., 2018, p.13) and that 'true food security' is only possible when social justice is considered fundamental to analyses of, and solutions to, food insecurity (Cadieux and Slocum, 2015, p.3). Food justice practices thus intervene against structural inequalities by asking for fairer distribution and procedures, for instance. Accordingly, building directly on Cadieux and Slocum's (2015, p. 13) take on what constitutes food justice, the community food initiatives analysed in this thesis rely on two areas to achieve food justice:

> '1) Acknowledging and confronting historical, collective social trauma and persistent race, gender, and class inequalities';
> 2) Designing exchange mechanisms that build communal reliance and control.'.

Community food initiatives form what I coin 'Twilight Food Networks (TFNs)', a heterogenous body of local, grassroots initiatives that provide free food to anyone in need in either the long or short term. The attributive noun 'twilight' refers to the ambiguous and ephemeral nature of initiatives that may be legal entities or informal groups. This is discussed in full in chapter Three.

Care ethics has been used to refer to a critical ethic of care and responsibility by means of a collective that challenges how neoliberal approaches have marginalised care and privatised responsibility (Lawson, 2007). Applied to emergency food providers, an ethic of care approach promotes what Kneafsey et al. (2018, p. 26) refer to as 'discourses and practices of 'reconnection' with radical and transformatory potential'. Drawing on the work of Joan Tronto (1993), Kneafsey at al. (2018) suggest that the act of caring is a process by which people consider others and choose to confront inequalities. Cloke et al. (2016, p.11) emphasise the value of geographies of care in framing food banks as 'institutional, relational and performative places of practical and emotional work involving practices and cultures of listening and responding to the needs of people in crisis'. In this dissertation, following on from Cloke et al. (2106), community kitchens can be considered as relational spaces of care that take responsibility for those in food poverty and seek to address injustices to make the world a better place. Food justice and care ethics, and their application to this current study of community kitchens, will be explored much more fully in Chapter Two which positions this thesis within past and current academic debates through a more substantial literature review.

4. Key concepts

This section considers six important concepts that underpin this research project, namely food security, food poverty, poverty, food charity and emergency food provision. Similar to the conceptual frameworks of food justice and an ethics of care, Chapter Two provides a broader discussion of all these notions and their relevance within food-related debates in the literature.

4.1 Food security and food poverty

Since the 1974 World Food Conference, food security has been defined by the Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations as comprised of four components: (i) availability of sufficient quantities of food of appropriate quality, supplied through domestic production or imports, including food aid; (ii) access by individuals to adequate resources for acquiring appropriate foods for a nutritious diet; (iii) utilisation of food through adequate diet, clean water, sanitation and health care to reach a state of nutritional well-being where all physiological needs are met; and (iv) availability and access dimensions that do not get affected by sudden shocks (e.g. an economic, political or climatic crisis) or cyclical events (e.g.

seasonal food insecurity) (FAO, 2006). The initial definition was revised in 2015 to include the important notion of 'social acceptability' thereby emphasising the role of choice in the act of acquiring food. In summary, food poverty is characterised by the following dimensions: economic access, quality, quantity, duration and social acceptability. Two definitions of the concept are retained throughout this study:

> the inability to acquire or consume an adequate quality or sufficient quantity of food in socially acceptable ways, or the uncertainty that one will be able to do so (Dowler et al., 2011, p.44).
> food poverty is the insufficient economic access to an adequate quantity and quality of food to maintain a nutritionally satisfactory and socially acceptable diet (O'Connor et al., 2016, p.432).

Food security occurs when people can access enough safe and nutritious food to meet their requirements for a healthy life, in sustainable ways. According to the third *Global Nutrition Report*, an annual peer-reviewed publication that seeks to end 'malnutrition in all its forms' (International Food Policy Research Institute, 2016, p.xiv), many countries are now experiencing the double burden of hunger and undernutrition alongside overweight and obesity, with one in three people across the globe currently suffering from malnutrition. Malnutrition and poor diets constitute the number-one driver of the global burden of disease, and the prevalence rates of overweight, obesity and diet-related non-communicable diseases such as cardiovascular disease, stroke, certain cancers and type II diabetes, are increasing everywhere, in both developed and developing countries (NCD-RisC, 2016). Globally, there are now more people who are overweight or obese than underweight, with the two combined accounting for more than half of the world population. At the same time, as detailed in the above-mentioned 2016 *Global Nutrition Report*, around 795 million people face daily hunger and more than two billion lack vital micronutrients, especially iron, zinc and vitamin A, affecting their health and life expectancy.

4.2 Poverty and food insecurity in the UK

The Office for National Statistics most recent figures, from 2015, indicate that the UK had the fifth lowest rate of persistent poverty (7.3%), but the 13th highest poverty rate of 16.7%, near the EU average of 17.3% out of twenty-eight countries.[4] That same year the poverty threshold

[4] The European Union comprised twenty-eight countries until the 1st of February 2020, date at which the UK officially left the EU. As of 2022, it is now made up of twenty-seven countries (EU, 2022).

(after tax) was estimated at £12,567 and it was found that almost three in ten persistently poor individuals could not afford four or more items from a list of several items deemed 'essential' in ordinary modern life, including heating one's home, and purchasing meals with meat, chicken, fish or a vegetarian equivalent every other day. The largest research study on poverty and social exclusion ever conducted in the UK (PSE:UK) reveals important levels of deprivation, with 18 million people unable to afford adequate housing, 14 million essential household goods, and nearly half the population experiencing some type of financial insecurity (Bramley and Bailey, 2017). Drawing on the 2018 findings of the UN Special Rapporteur on Extreme Poverty and Human Rights (UNHRC, 2019), Pat Caplan succinctly summarised the current situation in the introduction to her *Food Poverty and Charity in the UK* report published in 2020*:*

> Although the United Kingdom is the world's fifth largest economy, one fifth of its population (14 million people) live in poverty, and 1.5 million of them experienced destitution in 2017. Policies of austerity introduced in 2010 continue largely unabated, despite the tragic social consequences. Close to 40 per cent of children are predicted to be living in poverty by 2021. Food banks have proliferated; homelessness and rough sleeping have increased greatly; tens of thousands of poor families must live in accommodation far from their schools, jobs and community networks; life expectancy is falling for certain groups; and the legal aid system has been decimated. The social safety net has been badly damaged by drastic cuts to local authorities' budgets, which have eliminated many social services, reduced policing services, closed libraries in record numbers, shrunk community and youth centres and sold off public spaces and buildings. The bottom line is that much of the glue that has held British society together since the Second World War has been deliberately removed and replaced with a harsh and uncaring ethos (Caplan, 2020, p.10).

Since the 1980s in the Global North more generally, joblessness and reduction in public expenditure including less social security and welfare support have exacerbated issues of food insecurity for people with low-income. Austerity measures have further shrunk the welfare state, and this trend is likely to remain with the roll-out of Universal Credit (UC), a 2016-8 reform to the existing benefits system combining six benefits (including unemployment benefit, tax credits and housing benefit) into one online-only scheme. General support was granted across all parties because UC aimed to simplify the existing system and increase incentives to work. Its gradual roll-out has however raised concerns, such as long delays in payment potentially leading to rent arrears, hunger, expensive credit and mental health issues (Butler, 2017b). The new benefits system will be further discussed in the literature review given its association with steadily increasing levels of food poverty UK-wide.

In that respect, recent survey findings suggest that food insecurity has been on the rise in the last decade and especially since the introduction of UC. For instance, the 2016 'Food and You Survey' commissioned by the Government's Food Standards Agency revealed that 8% of all adults (3.9 million) were food insecure (lacking sufficient and secure access to food because of a lack of money), a further 13% of adults were only marginally food secure in the last twelve months (FSA, 2016). In the same period, rates of food insecurity were as high as 23% among adults in the lowest income quartiles and 47% among unemployed adults. The same survey findings also revealed a category of working poor whereby 7% of people in work were found to be food insecure. A previous report, published in 2014 report by Oxfam UK, the Trussell Trust and Church Action on Poverty found that twenty million meals were handed out in the 2013, a 54% increase on the previous year (Food Ethics Council, 2010). The food poverty crisis is particularly visible among children and during the holiday periods, as exemplified by the 'End hunger UK campaign' set up in 2017 to tackle hunger in the UK, especially over the school holidays (EHUK, 2018). Data published by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation reveal that approximately four million children live below the official poverty line in the UK, even though the majority live in households with at least an adult in employment (Purdam, 2017). Researchers have noted a growth in the distribution of Trussell Trust foodbanks parcels in areas marked by high childhood deprivation, which for them, correlates with 2012/3 austerity measures, welfare reforms and rising living costs (Lambie-Mumford and Green, 2015).

Members of the public and celebrities in particular have sought to address child food poverty. For instance, the Premier League footballer Marcus Rashford set up the 'Child Food Poverty Task' in 2020. The aim of this coalition of charities and corporates was to encourage the Government to implement recommendations from the first part of the National Food Strategy, an independent review of England's food system published in June of the same year (ECFP, 2020; NFS, 2021). He then went on to launch a parliamentary petition to 'end childhood food poverty', which obtained one million signatures in a very short amount of time. His efforts resulted not only in extended funding towards initiatives aimed at child food poverty alleviation, but also in increased public awareness of food poverty UK-wide.

The food poverty scholar Kayleigh Garthwaite (2016, p. 2) had already noted the rapid growth of the Trussell Trust foodbank network in her 2016 book *Hunger Britain,* where she detailed

the rising demand for emergency food aid, 'a shocking condemnation of current government policies' in her view. Reflecting on Guardian journalist Patrick Butler's 2012 article comparing UK foodbanks to those in the US, and Canada, Garthwaite (2106, p. 3) uses his analogy of the 'foodbank genie' being let out of the bottle to show that mentions of foodbanks are everywhere. Local radio stations and supermarkets entice donations, and films such as Ken Loach's *I, Daniel Blake* talked job loss, benefits and the use of food banks. In this climate, and prior to the start of the Covid-19 pandemic, numerous articles have highlighted the rising number of food banks users who rely on emergency food assistance to meet basic nutritional needs (Bartholomew, 2020; Butler, 2020; O'Hara, 2017), and while it is largely accepted that this number in on the rise, data might be skewed because the perceived upsurge could be attributed to increased numbers of food banks and visibility, or renewed political will to oppose legislation by the current government. The Covid-19 pandemic clearly revealed vulnerabilities within the global food supply as evidenced by supply chain disruptions for retailers and panic buying among consumers (Pautz and Dempsey, 2021). Food access problems were immediately visible, with lockdown measures and fears of contamination exacerbating the situation. Estimates point to the number of food insecure individuals having quadrupled during the initial lockdown, and the creation of 'new economic vulnerability' for those who had either lost their income, could not acquire food due to physical constraints or unavailable supplies (Loopstra, 2020). As a temporary solution, local authorities funded hubs to deliver parcels to vulnerable individuals that, however, also relied heavily on emergency food systems. As shown in a report produced by the British Red Cross (2020), multi-agency support systems emerged at the start of the pandemic to meet urgent food insecurity in the community. Informal 'mutual aid' groups were formed in addition to networks made up of voluntary charities across the country that could apply for government funding streams such as the £16 million provided by the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport to charities that delivered food aid (British Red Cross, 2020). Mutual aid groups were an example of community support that utilised 'the strength of humans and our implicit mutualism', set up to protect those most at risk at the height of the pandemic (Mould et al., 2022, p.14)

The above will be further discussed in the first and second empirical chapters where I discuss the TFN's flexible approach to current events.

4.3 Food charity and emergency food provision within AFNs

The alternative food movement, born out of dissatisfaction with the industrial food system (Goodman et al., 2010), initially manifested itself as a diverse network that included organic farming, fair-trade network, and other activities in support of local agriculture and sustainable food consumption (Jarosz, 2014; Potter, 1996). The alternative economy framework applied to the analysis of hunger and food-based movements directed at low-income people in this dissertation may be defined as a parallel food network—referred to as the TFN here—that decentralises the dominant capitalist discourse and presents citizens with supplementary ways of contributing to their community. Welfare reform has led to fewer public services aimed at underprivileged and marginalised people and has made charitable groups that provide support services to the community more visible. The numerous non-profit, charitable, cooperative, social enterprises and community-based groups might have grown recently in response to the retreat of the welfare state, as a means to address unmet needs in the community (Cadieux et al., 2017, p.36). In this climate, alternative food initiatives have emerged within Alternative Food Networks to challenge corporate-led, industrial food systems by developing viable and localised solutions (Levkoe, 2011, p.343). These projects promote 'transformative food politics' by combining social justice, ecological sustainability, community health and democracy. They refer to alternative, sustainable food system activities that attempt to integrate the environmental, economic, and social health of their food systems in particular places (Feenstra, 2002) and address wide-ranging environmental and social issues, including those that are within the realms of justice, sustainability, health, and governance (Levkoe and Wakefield, 2014).

The food initiatives in this study refer to a body of food projects within Alternative Food Networks, but they differ from alternative food initiatives described by Levkoe and Wakefield (2014) as they are located within emergency food provisioning systems. The focus is on meals and food parcels that are freely given to the community in the urban landscape. These food projects are charitable initiatives that offer meals to those who cannot obtain them from mainstream commercial food systems (Lambie-Mumford, 2017) due to a myriad of reasons such as no or low income, lack of cooking facilities or skills, or residence in temporary shelter with access to crowded kitchens. Qualifying these systems as 'emergency' signifies the immediacy and urgency associated with the provisioning of food via projects that include soup runs, community kitchens and food fridges among many others. Hannah Lambie-

Mumford and Elizabeth Dowler (2015, p. 501) accurately note the conflicting terminology of 'food charity' but establish a distinction between food banks and other types of food charities. In the UK, a food bank firmly refers to an emergency provider, 'a community project which provides parcels of food for people to take away, prepare and eat' whereas there might be differing terminology in the US (Lambie-Mumford and Dowler, 2015, p.501) such as food pantries that act directly or as intermediaries to community kitchens. Given the importance of terminology, a more detailed exploration is presented in the literature review (Chapter Two).

Despite their usefulness in austere times, emergency food provision systems have been criticised for they 'are unable to cope with growing hunger in a meaningful, stable, efficient, and culturally appropriate way' and 'facilitate government retrenchment' (Wakefield et al., 2012, p.427). This critique follows on from that of Janet Poppendieck (1999) in her pioneering publication *Sweet Charity* where food programmes that operate within the emergency food system are found to enable a charitable safety net that do not address the root cause of hunger in North America. In the same vein, Martin Caraher and Sinéad Furey (2017) have argued that the redistribution of surplus food to emergency food aid providers immediately relieves hunger yet fails to address food insecurity. Moreover, the convenient redistribution of surplus food 'depoliticises hunger and allows governments not to address the gap between income and food costs' (Caraher and Furey, 2017, p.18). This view is shared by the scholar Pat Caplan (2017, p.17) for whom combining the issues of food surplus[5] at the supermarket level and food poverty is not a 'win-win' situation. While temporarily relieving hunger among recipients, the redistribution of unsold edible food via food banks is not a solution to neither problems of food waste nor food poverty and social injustices (Caplan, 2017). Similar to Caplan's views, Andrew Williams and colleagues (2016, p.2291) go further by suggesting that food banks 'deflec[t] attention from fundamental injustices in the food system'. The politicisation of the food banking system at local and national levels legitimises and normalises charitable food assistance in the UK as it has done elsewhere, most notably in North America (Williams et al., 2016). Beyond food banks, local food projects that range from 'practical sessions on cooking, through food co-operatives or transport schemes, community

[5] Food surplus refers to edible products that is still valuable but cannot be sold due to their imperfections or to them being close to their 'sell-by' dates (Caplan, 2017). Food surplus and 'edible food waste' can be synonymous (eg. Caplan, 2017; Caraher and Furey, 2017) whereas 'food waste' designates food that is thrown away, and therefore no longer fit for human consumption (Evans, 2012). The redistribution of supermarket surplus will be discussed in the first empirical chapter given its importance within the TFNs (Chapter Three).

cafes and gardening clubs, to breakfast clubs in schools' were found to be beneficial to the community in some ways but not in the long term as they neither tackled longer-term structural changes needed to improve food access nor social injustices for those on low income (Dowler and Caraher, 2003, p.58).

Yet, in some instances, emergency food providers such as food banks have been found to be evolving spaces that can turn emergency food relief into spaces that enable people to grow, cook and share food, and even advocate for healthier, more democratic food systems and sustainable diets (Levkoe and Wakefield, 2011). More than an exception, food banks that evolve into neighbourhood hubs can encourage changes in the food movement towards more just food systems and social change. This sentiment is shared by Paul Cloke and colleagues whose analysis of food banks point to 'in the meantime' activities that do not simply function as 'sticking plaster work' for temporary relief that moreover acts against radical structural change (Cloke et al., 2016). Unlike critics of food aid, Cloke et al. (2016, p. 19) find that food banks and other 'in the meantime' politics may lead to 'more progressive and hopeful spaces of political conscientization, invention and reorientation' and enable a reconceptualization of 'seemingly mundane spaces of care and welfare that are ill-served by analytical binaries'. This research project —given my grounded engagement with community food kitchen practices, operations and outcomes—adopts a similar perspective to food projects that function within emergency food system by considering them as life-saving endeavours through the alleviation of immediate hunger and provision of care, and as potential catalysts to transformative food politics and social change.

5. Research design and methodology

I began this project with a desk-based study of the literature and exploration of existing community initiatives. A variety of qualitative methods were used, including ethnography, participant observation and formal and informal interviews. My choice of qualitative methods was dictated by important food banking research conducted by social geographers in the last decade. Kayleigh Garthwaite's (2016, p.13) work is informed by her role as a researcher and Trussell Trust volunteer, whereas Hannah Lambie-Mumford's (2017, p.6) account of charitable food assistance in the UK draws on data collected at Trussell Trust foodbanks and from fifty-two interviews. For anthropologist Pat Caplan (2019, p.5), much existing work within food

poverty research 'lacked the kind of ethnographic context which anthropologists demand'. Accordingly, for her, missing concerns included 'locality and social environment', and the voices of food bank clients as well as that of other stakeholders at various levels (Caplan, 2019, p.5). I therefore made note of Caplan's research methods, which consisted of ethnography, participant observation through volunteering and netnography. Outside of food studies, I was influenced by geographer Andy Williams (2016) whose residential ethnography in a faith-based therapeutic community led him to identify various issues in research that makes use of participatory research methods. Issues concerned the management of the researcher's identity, access to participants, obtainment of informed consent and 'the dilemma of mixed loyalties' (Williams, 2016). I too encountered similar 'mixed loyalties' in my own research amidst interactions with kitchen leaders, charity partners, service users and volunteers while attempting to fulfil my roles as a charity leader and doctoral researcher.

Prior to the start of this doctoral research project, I had been a regular volunteer at various food-based charities and day centres for homeless people in Cambridge and London. Familiarity with some of the ways in which community initiatives cater for most vulnerable individuals helped draft the proposal for this research project. Upon my arrival in the town of Reading in 2016, I naturally began volunteering with grassroots that provide meals to disadvantaged groups, and I only started the process of data collection when ethics approval was granted in Spring 2017. A few months later, I was accepted as one of twelve members of the community kitchen 'Sadaka' and assigned the role of volunteers and social media lead for the charity. Here began my journey into the realm of 'scholar activism' where I experienced my share of previously mentioned 'mixed loyalties', as referred to by Williams (2016). While I sought to meet academic requirements by conducting ethical research and tending to compulsory components of the doctorate degree, such as attending meetings, presenting at conferences, and submitting written work, I gradually became more involved in activities that were unrelated to the research questions. As such, I spoke on behalf of charities, cooked meals, led sessions, helped with fundraising events, training and other day-to-day tasks that are key to the successful running of charities. Navigating tensions that arose from conducting research and working towards greater food justice on the ground is a topic that is discussed in greater depth in Chapter Five. Methodological and time constraints as well as research outputs and ethical considerations were noteworthy aspects of the research process.

The main categories in this research project emerged from the extensive fieldnotes that wrote following every single visit at community initiatives, or after any interaction with a service user or leader. I followed advice found in Emerson et al.'s (2011) manuscript, *Writing Ethnographic Fieldnotes,* where the authors crucially warn researchers against deferring the act of taking notes during fieldwork. I chose to handwrite my observations in notebooks that I carried with me because carrying a laptop was neither practical nor safe given the nature of my fieldwork, that is, the immersion in environments populated by low income individuals, and where retreating to a corner with my laptop proved impossible. I wrote fieldnotes onsite in kitchens, lavatories or by the side of the road, as well as on the train to/from sessions but rarely at my desk as I did not want to forget any details that might later on prove relevant to the research. Appendix B provides an example of the type of field notes I took, and the process by which identified important categories that I subsequently entered into a word document along with my observations and any direct quote from informal interactions or interviews. In this example, diary categories include terminology used within the TFN, type of food served at sessions, safeguarding and vulnerability of SUs, solidarity among service providers, schedule of survival for SUs and the importance of social media in the management of sessions.

My application of participatory methods derived from my gradually re-positioning as a leading volunteer in one of the charities where I conducted ethnographic research. Data collection spanned from over a three-year period, from 2017 to 2020 in the town of Reading and its surroundings where numerous charities serve food and non-food items to vulnerable individuals. The aim was to discover how community kitchens respond to food poverty in urban centres. I sought to understand how ordinary citizens selflessly organise themselves to provide non-perishable food, wholesome meals and basic goods to vulnerable people on a regular basis. In so doing, I was exposed and contributed to the TFN, a concept that designates initiatives that operate within the invisible realm of food assistance in towns and cities, at the margins of mainstream systems of food provisioning and within AFNs. Chapter Five critically reflects on the research process and the key methods discussed in this section in greater depth by considering the role of the researcher-activist in participatory research within food movements as a distinct contribution to debates surrounding food movements, food charity, and the importance of participatory methodologies in food-related research.

6. Producing ethical research

The most intricate aspect of this research was to approach people within community kitchens, especially in instances where I was already volunteering. Prior to starting my research project, I had been a regular volunteer at London-based projects hence my familiarity with the environment. Community kitchens are spaces where vulnerable people interact and where volunteers dedicate considerable amounts of time and resources. Therefore, any perceived critical stance I expected to be frowned upon and the presence of disruptive researchers potentially undesired. Understandably, service users do not appreciate being a subject of study. At what point would I tell kitchen leaders, volunteers and service users that I was not only helping with the operations, but also observing them and their activities?

Citing the work of Linda Smith (1999), Möller (2022, p. 10) mentions colonial legacies in western empiricism, and applied to this study, the intersections of poverty research and imperialism. In his own research, Möller sought to avoid 'confessional dynamics' by transforming clients of food banks into 'useful objects of scientific study' with whom interviews would turn into 'confessions'. His comments highlight asymmetrical power relations between researchers and vulnerable participants, and furthermore, evoke latest debates involving celebrities fronting the charity Comic Relief's campaign in the African continent. Issues of 'poverty porn', charities perpetuating 'the white saviour complex' and engaging in 'poverty tourism' were raised by various critics including the Labour MP David Lammy who affirmed not questioning the good motives of British celebrities that produce documentaries (The Week UK, 2019). Instead, for Lammy, the problem lies with 'self-serving' nature of the 'help' provided by white people to non-white people, reminiscing colonial times. The aid and communications expert Jennifer Lentfer has extensively written on 'power asymmetries and global inequalities while trying to "do good" (Lentfer, 2022) and, in a 2018 article for the *Guardian* (Lentfer, 2018), she emphasised the need to question how charities raise awareness and money, and to respectfully tell people's stories, without trivialising or misrepresenting people as helpless so it fits the campaign's narrative. These concerns will be discussed in greater depth in Chapter Five where I further explore the concepts of 'poverty porn' when collecting data and offer an alternative to what may be perceived as 'self-serving' research through the adoption of an 'activist-scholarship' approach.

To comply with ethical standards, the process of data collection only began once I had obtained the approval of the Ethics Committee at the University of Reading. Informed consent was given by all session leaders and participants following a brief description of the project's purpose and procedures. Interviews were conducted through various formal and informal engagements and settings, but consent was always granted in written or verbal form, and participants were informed they could stop the interview at any point or contact me further on to be excluded from the research. Confidentiality was promised to participants and pseudonyms allocated to each to ensure anonymity. Precautions were taken to protect their privacy and when sensitive personal matters were discussed, I asked participants whether they objected to these being used in my study.

I aimed to ensure that the openness and intimacy of my research would have no negative repercussions on my participants. I was respectful in my inquiries, remaining sensitive to participants' personal boundaries. For this, I constantly monitored the interpersonal dynamics of the interviews. In my view, at no point did my ability to listen attentively to personal accounts lead to a 'quasi-therapeutic relationship' (Brinkmann and Kvale, 2009, p.73). This especially mattered in this research project because I did not want to mislead participants, the service users in particular by giving them the impression that our encounters served any other purpose than inform my research. When participants shared information that suggested they needed support I sought to sign-post them to appropriate services, and to further help them I produced a printable resource listing all support services in the town of Reading. I sought to make interactions as positive as possible for participants by highlighting their rich and valuable insights and by refraining from offering simplistic solutions to their problems, for example, by suggesting they look for a better job if financial hardship explained their reliance on food handouts.

7. Research positionality

I am a white, non-British female in their thirties from a middle-class background, who grew up in multicultural environments among Christians, Hindus and Muslims. Socio-economic status, age, ethnic background, and faith were particularly important in this study given the target population of community kitchens and the prevalence of faith-based community initiatives in emergency food systems. The majority of participants are white British men in their twenties

up to their fifties who experience precarity, that is, who find themselves in a state of persistent insecurity with regards to their circumstances such as: employment, income, lack of social rights or accommodation, as described by Martin McKee and colleagues (2017). Individuals whose lives are precarious can also be deemed vulnerable particularly when they possess limited capabilities due to low reserves of human, economic and social capital, all of which vary during their life course (McKee et al., 2017).

Throughout the research process, I continually reflected on how my own background, interests, assumptions, and beliefs might influence data collection and inquiry. A reflexivity stance allows the researcher to consider how they relate to the research topic, research participants, and ways they might represent them in subsequent written reports (Charmaz, 2005). Participation observation required that I continually inform participant that I was engaging in research, and that I gradually gain their trust. Even at times when I disagreed with my research participants, such as the approach of a kitchen leader who told me that 'charity is done for and through Christ and service users can only be saved by serving God', I chose to stay quiet and respect that this approach was one that kept the Christian organisation they led operational.

Interviews were either conducted in formal settings, in written format as exchanges over social media platforms or informally during the activities at community kitchens. Although the 'inter-view' is a site where 'knowledge is constructed in the inter-action between two people', it is not regarded as an open dialogue between egalitarian partners (Brinkmann and Kvale, 2009, p.2). Interviews entail asymmetrical relations of power between the interviewer, who initiates the interview, and interviewees, who mainly answer questions. From this, the following concern arises: whether subjects express what they knowingly believe the authority wants to hear. Commonly known as social desirability bias, this tendency to favourably answer questions can interfere with the collection of representative data. Formal interviews were especially marked by the social desirability bias, whereby interviewees would ask me if their answer was 'good enough' for my study. By contrast, informal conversations during the meal preparation for instance never presented this issue.

A second challenge concerned striking a balance between probing a statement in a neutral manner as opposed to one that was deliberately leading. Whilst the researcher aims for

natural, conversation-like interviews that run smoothly, the study's imperatives dictate that specific material must be covered during interactions (Rubin and Babbie, 2007, p.104). For example, I could not lead them to specific responses by asking how useful community kitchens had been for them, and instead, I had to rely on open-ended questions to see how they had tackled their past predicaments. If most participants were talkative and happy to share their experiences, some had to be probed into discussing certain aspects of their life that had led to them to rely on charitable endeavours for basic needs. And, at times, my former personal struggles such as insecure work in the form of zero-hour contracts or sharing sub-standard living arrangements allowed me to enquire about participants' past and current challenges as someone who had some, albeit minor, lived experience of hardship. Knowledge about policy changes, for instance with regards to the roll-out of Universal Credit, enabled greater understanding of ways in which participants had been affected by recent changes in benefits entitlement, and in turn, allowed for richer conversations with interviewees.

I was also sensitive to another form of bias that may occur during the analytical process, such as purposefully selecting answers that validate the thesis. I endeavoured to avoid this by systematically transcribing all interviews, writing extensive fieldnotes and conducting a thorough and as far as possible dispassionate analysis of participants' responses. I was aware of the tension between my role as a researcher and a volunteer and refrained from interviewing people I knew were too vulnerable or those I had helped because I felt that emotional bonds would have clouded my judgements and thus, prevented the transfer of valid data. I was also conscious to respect all participants and refrain from treating them as research subjects, taking the data I needed for my study and walking away from the field shortly after. To counter this, I actively volunteered at various charities and became an active member of a Reading-based charity, where I run social media platforms and help manage volunteers' data. This aspect of the dissertation will be discussed in all three empirical chapters and especially in Chapter Four and Five, where I detail my contribution to the charity's online engagement and the role of research-activism in food poverty research, respectively.

8. Contribution to academic debates

This present project discusses community empowerment through the study of networked charitable initiatives—the TFN—that operate thanks to a care ethics that in turn enables greater food justice (Chapter Three). Further, it aims to understand how community food projects use digital platforms to run their operations, promote their work and create links with wide-ranging partners (Chapter Four). The ways charities use social media affect how the public might see, experience and, though volunteering, fight determinants of food insecurity, namely poverty and social injustices. Initiatives and their volunteers may play a central role in efforts aimed at reducing various social injustices, including those that are food related. In that respect, community kitchens may act as a catalyst for public engagement to reduce hunger and poverty in the Global North, and prompt stakeholders, as hoped by Riches (2011, p. 775) to 'think and act outside the charity food charity box'. Lastly, it seeks to critically consider the modes by which academics research community food projects and the role of the activist-researcher (Chapter Five).

This project fills a gap in research on community-based projects in the UK. Much existing literature and empirical work has explored the role of food banks in addressing rising levels of food poverty, which is in great part a response to austerity measures and the retreat of the welfare state. Research has explored how food aid in the form of food banking has come to fill the gap between a shrinking welfare state and rising living costs in western countries, most notably in the United Kingdom, the United States and Canada, and Australia. In particular, scholars conducting poverty and food bank research in the UK include Pat Caplan, Elizabeth Dowler, Kayleigh Garthwaite and Hannah Lambie Mumford (Caplan, 2017, 2019, 2020; Dowler and Lambie-Mumford, 2014; Lambie-Mumford and Dowler, 2015; Garthwaite et al., 2015; Garthwaite, 2016; Spring et al., 2022; Lambie-Mumford et al., 2014; Lambie-Mumford and O'Connell, 2015; Lambie-Mumford, 2017). These authors have exposed the drivers of growing food poverty, responses provided by corporate food charities and argued for policy-driven responses to ensure everyone can access food. Rachel Loopstra adopts a quantitative approach to evaluating evidence on interventions aimed at reducing food insecurity high-income countries, and the characteristics of food bank recipients in order to inform policy and the activities of organisations such as the Trussell Trust or the Food Foundation (Loopstra et al., 2015, 2016; Taylor and Loopstra, 2016; Loopstra, 2018b, 2020).

Still in the UK, Geographers Paul Cloke, John May and Andy Williams have individually written on social justice. They have collaborated to discuss faith-based responses to food poverty and to conceptualise food banks as spaces of care offering hopeful possibilities (Cloke et al., 2013; Johnsen et al., 2008; Cloke et al., 2016; May, Williams, Cloke, and Liv Cherry, 2020). Food and health scholar Martin Caraher has extensively written on emergency food aid provision and in particular, his critical take on the use of surplus food has been influential within food poverty research because it refutes the idea that surplus food is one of many ways to alleviate food poverty (Dowler and Caraher, 2003; Wells and Caraher, 2014; Caraher and Furey, 2017; Caraher, 2017). Sociologist Chris Möller (2019; 2022) has also criticised the ways food collection events are instrumentalised by stakeholders including food banks, politicians and supermarkets, turning food poverty into a spectacle, and furthermore, contributing to rather than reducing social inequalities. Moya Kneafsey and colleagues' considerable research has explored people's relationship with food, for instance with regards to its availability, access and affordability, and as such, have considered what food security means to more generally (Dowler et al., 2011; Kneafsey et al., 2013). In addition, Kneafsey and colleagues have used the ethic of care framework to show the radical potential of alternative food networks practices (Kneafsey et al., 2008) and they have written on local initiatives' potential for building greater food justice in the UK (Kneafsey et al., 2017).

Important US-based and Canadian research in the field of emergency food systems and food banks, also known as food pantries in North America, was to a large extent initiated by Janet Poppendieck (1999) with *Sweet Charity* where she raised awareness about the limitations of charitable efforts aimed at alleviating food poverty, arguing that these hunger relief programs cannot replace effective public policy despite volunteers' good intentions. Additional key researchers include Adam Pine (2017) whose work considered how community initiatives tackle food insecurity, as did the work of Valerie Tarasuk and colleagues in Canada (Tarasuk et al., 2014; Loopstra and Tarasuk, 2014; Tarasuk and Eakin, 2005). Numerous scholars, including those previously cited, have presented critical accounts of dominant responses to growing food insecurity, and notably that of corporate food banking, an institutionalized form of hunger relief that illustrates failings of neoliberalism and welfare provision in rich countries. These scholars include Andy Fisher (2017), Katie Martin (2021), Graham Riches (2011, 2018), Rebecca de Souza (2019), and Sarah Wakefield (Fisher, 2017; Martin, 2021; Riches, 2011, 2018; De Souza, 2019; Wakefield et al., 2012).

In Canada, Rachel Engler-Stringer and Shawna Berenbaum (2005) are among a minority of researchers who have looked specifically into community kitchens, through the exploration of attendees' experience of food security during and away from sessions. In the UK, Power et al. (2017) propose valuable insight into food aid providers more generally by including other emergency respondents besides food banks. They further consider the role of faith-based food providers and issues of accessibility among most deprived recipients (Power et al., 2017; Power, 2022). A review of the literature on food organisations in Australia sought to define the nature, size and reach of emergency food relief providers (Lindberg et al., 2015). The scholars Lindberg et al. (2015) note the importance of establishing the value of existing responses to food insecurity so that better approaches, including improved partnership with public health authorities, might shed a light on policy failures and lead to better health outcomes for vulnerable client groups. As such, they emphasise the value of greater transparency and collaboration among stakeholders. In a subsequent paper, Lindberg et al. (2017, p. 26) present research that further highlights common ambivalence within food poverty research with regards to the potential of food aid charities to both 'hinder and help people maintain dignity, social inclusion, and health'.

While much work has criticised emergency food responses to hunger, emphasising the problematic relationship between food aid providers and the state for instance, some scholars have nevertheless identified what might be called 'silver linings'. Hannah Lambie-Mumford has particularly praised the constructive role of emergency food providers that act as spaces of care and facilitate social support as well as welfare networks (Lambie-Mumford, 2017). Graham Riches (2011) notes the value of charitable food banking as a relief to short-term hunger, however, similar to Andy Fisher (2017) and Katie Martin (2021), Riches (2011, p. 768) criticises its institutionalisation and corporatisation, both of which give the impression that food poverty is being solved and that the concept of hunger is 'a matter for charity, not politics'. Sarah Wakefield and colleagues (2012) have looked at institutionalised hunger relief by means of emergency food provision in Canada and sought to respond to critiques pertaining to their limitations in terms of enabling progressive social change. These debates will be revisited in greater detail in the literature review (Chapter 2).

9. Thesis Chapters

The structure of this thesis reflects the research journey of this PhD project. Chapter One introduces the thesis and Chapter Two details the literature that was used to ground the research. The empirical chapters cover three important themes that I identified while conducting fieldwork and reflecting on the data process. Specifically, Chapter Three builds on the literature review by exposing how public-led initiatives address poverty and rising food insecurity in towns and cities. These initiatives form what I call 'twilight food networks' that are made up of various organisations that provide food to low-income and vulnerable individuals. In this chapter, I situate the TFNs and detail the different types of initiatives that comprise these networks, and how they deliver food in 'a world of plenty'. Chapter Three, along with Chapter Four draw on my fieldwork and activism as a scholar-researcher, the latter point being the central theme of Chapter Five. Chapter Four, then, focuses on an important aspect of food justice activism, that of social media use to promote the work of food charities, fight injustices, and to facilitate the survival of fragile charitable systems of support. Lastly, Chapter Five presents my reflections I as sought to address what Williams (2016) refers to as 'mixed loyalties': meeting the academic requirements while, in my case, attempting to volunteer and contribute to the activities of the TFNs. In that sense, the last empirical chapter provides an overview of the research process, exposing not only some of the constraints associated with participatory research methods but also the potential of such methods for producing material that positively contributes to the local population in the here and now.

Chapter Two: While written as a series of publishable papers—and thus with chapters that contain some of the literature the study is contextualised in—Chapter Two works to situate the thesis within the literature related to food justice, food aid and charity, and participatory research.

Chapter Three: The first empirical chapter, entitled '**Delivering food aid in a world of plenty through the emerging Twilight Food Networks of the UK'** discusses community empowerment through the study of networked charitable initiatives, coined 'Twilight Food Networks (TFNs)' that operate as spaces of care and facilitators of greater food justice. The TFN is conceptualised as a network of informal and 'fleeting' food justice organisations—hence their 'twilight' nature—such as community food kitchens that have been created and

grown in response to austerity, food poverty and Covid-19 in and across the UK. This chapter addresses all three main questions through an analysis of the rise of community food kitchens and other forms of food justice community organisations across the UK and specifically within Reading. In particular, the chapter contributes to theoretical and empirical debates within food geography by considering the place of these fleeting charitable initiatives in second generation AFNs through the novel introduction and analysis of the concept of the TFN and its relationship to AFNs, food banks, food poverty and food justice. I draw on ethnography and desk-based research to describe this ephemeral and fluctuating web of charitable food initiatives that provide food to anyone who needs it, without asking questions. This chapter builds on existing work within food insecurity studies, and in particular, research into movements that seek to confront food injustices, such as alternative food networks (all sections of Chapter Two).

Chapter Four: The second empirical chapter, entitled '**Go virtual to get real?: Digital activism, community kitchens and food justice in Southern England**', evaluates how community food projects use digital platforms to run their service, promote their work and create links with wide-ranging partners. Charities' interactions on social media affect how the public might conceptualise, experience, and address food insecurity through volunteering or others forms of advocacy. Therefore, this chapter answers the second and third research questions, namely 'how citizens have responded to growing poverty, inequalities and injustices in the food system' and 'how transformative food politics occur through community empowerment and the act of caring'. (6) Social media platforms provide an affordable and a user-friendly means to communicate with stakeholders and furthermore, they enable invaluable links between partners, which translate into improved service provision for service users. Based on analysis of TFN websites and social media posts—as well as my role as the social media lead for one particular organisation —digital food activism in TFNs is found to play an important role in efforts aimed at greater social justice by raising awareness but also through the ways that an online presence is needed to make community kitchens 'real' to funders, volunteers and guests. In this way, the online engagement of and by community kitchens via their volunteers, which are seen as 'networked individuals' (Rainie and Wellman, 2014), may act as a catalyst for greater public interest—and importantly access to public funding and donations—in issues that affect marginalised individuals and those on low income or undergoing other types of hardship. This chapter further relies on ethnographic data, interviews, interactions with

community kitchen volunteers and my own field notes. Main findings point to the potential of digital food activism in the alleviation of food poverty and the promotion of greater social justice. With regards to the literature review, this chapter builds on existing work that explores responses to growing poverty and food poverty in the UK, as well as discussions on ways in which food poverty is being addressed by emergency food systems and charitable food provisioning (sections 2 and 3 in Chapter Two).

Chapter Five: The last empirical chapter, entitled '**In and part of the field: studying and practising food justice as a scholar-activist**', considers the modes by which academics may study community food projects, and the role of the activist-researcher in participatory research. The second question of the thesis 'how citizens have responded to growing poverty, inequalities and injustices in the food system' is explored in this chapter since interest in food poverty is fuelled by a desire to address social injustices and other concerns with the food system. Through limited ethnography, participant observation and becoming a 'part' of a community food kitchen in Reading, I consider how activist scholarship may enact social change with and for social movements. By exploring my positionality as a researcher and the use of visceral methodologies, I reflect on the value of scholar activism in view of mixed loyalties when conducting both research and activism. I discuss the need for partnerships with grassroots, practitioners and those with lived experience of poverty in order to for researchers in food justice movements to advance knowledge and contribute positively to social justice. These partnerships, in turn, may enable scholar-activists in the food poverty and food justice movements to advance knowledge and positively contribute to social justice. I posit that a long-term engagement with food initiatives not only aid but may be instrumental in producing valuable research in the food movement. This chapter is mainly grounded in work that tackles responses to food insecurity such AFNs and second-generation AFNs (section 3 in Chapter Two).

Chapter Six concludes this dissertation with a short summary of its findings, my contribution and how to take this important research forward.

Chapter Two. Literature review

Chapter Two covers key theoretical and conceptual frameworks that form the basis of this thesis. The first part will detail the concepts of food security and poverty in the Global North by exploring definitions, scale and causes. The second part will discuss responses to food insecurity, namely charitable food aid and the food justice movement. The third part concerns the role of second generation AFNs in the form of community-led initiatives which have been set up to address food insecurity in wealthier nations.

1. Food security and food poverty in richer countries

1.1 Definition and scale

Global food systems differ and so do approaches to ensure food security in different countries. There is nevertheless consensus on what it means to be 'food insecure'. Officially since the 1974 World Food Conference, food security has been defined by the Food and Agriculture Organisation as comprising four components: (i) availability of sufficient quantities of food of appropriate quality, supplied through domestic production or imports, including food aid; (ii) access by individuals to adequate resources for acquiring appropriate foods for a nutritious diet; (iii) utilization of food through adequate diet, clean water, sanitation and health care to reach a state of nutritional well-being where all physiological needs are met; (iv) availability and access dimensions that do not get affected by sudden shocks, such as an economic, political or climatic crisis, or by cyclical events, for instance seasonal food insecurity due to weather events (FAO, 2006). Contrary to popular perception, the notion of food security does not only relate to countries in the so-called Global South (i.e. poorer countries), but it has rapidly ascended as a worldwide policy concern through societal and science agendas in the last ten years (Ingram, 2011; Sonnino, 2014). Food insecurity is not a new phenomenon especially in zones affected by years of conflict, which is a major driver of hunger according the World Food Programme (WFP, 2022). Recent data collected by the WFP estimates up to 811 million people 'do not have enough food' among which 45 million are at risk of famine, the most extreme form of hunger where death is highly likely. An ambitious target concerns the second UN sustainable Development for zero hunger worldwide given the ongoing 'toxic cocktail of conflict, climate change, disasters and structural poverty and inequality' in addition to the adverse effects of the COVID-19 pandemic

in recent years (WFP, 2022). An estimated nine million die every year of hunger, and while estimates had gradually decreased from 1990 to 2015, going from 110 to 784 millions of annual deaths respectively, the trend has reversed since 2016 with an increase in hungry people every year (TWC, 2022).

Rates of food insecurity are higher in low-income countries but there is nevertheless a prevalence of up to 20% in some high-income countries (Pool and Dooris, 2021), and further to this, a major difference between food insecurity in the Majority and the Minority Worlds concerns its scale. Food insecurity tends to primarily occur at the household and individual level in the Global North, as opposed to a population-level experience of food insecurity in many countries of the Majority World (Kneafsey et al., 2021), such as zones marked by conflicts as previously discussed, which is the case in Yemen, South Sudan and Syria (WFP, 2002). Globally, then, food insecurity is an important socio-economical and public health challenge, and sadly, the UK is no exception, with estimates varying from an average that is as low as 5.6% of the UK population reporting having experienced food insecurity from 2016 to 2018 (FAO, 2022) to 12% adults reporting living in households classified as food insecure in the financial year 2020-21 according to findings from the newly introduced food-related questions in the DWP's annual Family Resource Survey (DWP, 2022). The 2008 financial crisis, austerity measures and the pandemic aggravated the situation with figures point to a quadrupling of food insecurity in 2020 compared to data from two years earlier (Loopstra, 2020). These data as well as their determinants will be further detailed below and in section 1.3. Food security, then, is careful monitored at various levels and defined as having adequate healthy and culturally appropriate food, and the political empowerment to continue to press for an adequate and safe food supply (Dowler and Lambie-Mumford, 2014).

The concept of food poverty has been prominent in the media since the global 2007-9 recession, which broadly led to a reduction of purchasing power due to austerity measures in much of the Minority World, but especially the UK. Martin Caraher and Sinéad Furey (2018, pp 6-7) argue that the term 'food poverty' is more appropriate because it 'incorporates a political sense of urgency as well as a focus on the causes as opposed to the symptoms' whereas the term food security 'focuses on the measurable and misses the longer and bigger impact of living in poverty'. For instance, in the United States, many are considered food insecure because their reliance on government food subsidy programmes means that they are

dependent on federal welfare programmes that are unsustainable, leaving them politically vulnerable and economically marginalised (Allen, 1999). Following an extensive review of existing publications on food poverty, Niahm O'Connor and colleagues (2016, p. 429) define food poverty as 'the insufficient economic access to an adequate quantity and quality of food to maintain a nutritionally satisfactory and socially acceptable diet'. They note common features in the literature, namely, that both food poverty and food insecurity have to do with access to food that is limited due to concerns that include economic access, quality, quantity, duration and social considerations (O'Connor et al., 2016).

Despite minor differences in the definitions and use in the literature of the terms 'food insecurity' and 'food poverty', the former is preferred by international agencies such as the Food and Agriculture Organisation or the World Food Programme, hence the decision to favour food insecurity over food poverty to describe the lack of access or unstable access to nutritious and culturally appropriate food in official publications. As seen earlier, measures of food insecurity in the UK vary greatly. A commonly used survey is one that was commissioned by the UK Government's Food Standards Agency, and published in 2017, which points to approximately four million people, or 8% of adults in England, Wales, and Northern Ireland experiencing insufficient access to food due to lack of income in the last twelve months prior to data collection in 2014. The same survey indicates that 13% of adults suffered from moderately insecure food access, that is, they could not afford balanced meals, they worried about food running out or had experienced food scarcity (FSA, 2017). Since April 2019, the Department for Work and Pensions measures household food poverty in the United Kingdom using additional questions to the Family Resource Survey (FRS), an annual study of the standards and circumstances of people living in the United Kingdom. In the FRS, households are considered food secure when they have access to both sufficient and varied food to facilitate an active and a healthy lifestyle (DWP, 2021a, 2022). Findings from data collected in the financial year 2019-20 show that 87% of households were food secure with 8% reporting low to very low household food security, that is, they had their eating patterns disrupted due to insufficient resources or money for food in the last thirty days. Most recent data for the financial year 2020-21 point to 88% of households reporting being food secure against 6% reporting experiencing low to very low household food security, which indicates a minor improvement. However, as noted in the DWP (2022) report, findings from the FRS must be handled with caution due to small sample size especially in the financial year 2020-2021

because data collection was affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. Accordingly, while the FRS was designed to produce robust regional estimates, sample composition was abnormally influenced by recent events which considerably impacted household composition and incomes.

Despite the above-discussed limitations of the survey, the additional questions to the FRS constitute a victory for End Hunger UK, the UK coalition of charities that campaigned for a food poverty measurement tool (EHUK, 2019). This is because, as stated by Anna Taylor from the Food Foundation charity who campaigned with End Hunger, 'a problem we understand is a problem we can solve' (Food Foundation, 2019). Caraher and Furey (2018) refer to an earlier Food Standards Agency survey, conducted in 2005, prior to the economic crisis of 2007–2012 which found that a fifth of low-income households regularly reduced their food intake or went without eating for lack of money. While both scholars argue that a measure of security is necessary to measure progress, they warn that '[twenty-five] years of measurement in the United States and Canada has not resulted in solutions' (Caraher and Furey, 2018, p.19). In a report for the Food Foundation, Rachel Loopstra equally highlights an important limitation of the measurement that only considers how many people report experiencing food insecurity in any given month (FF, 2019). This ignores the transient nature of food poverty, which means that a person might be lacking funds for food one month prior to responding to the survey, but not immediately afterwards. An annual measure might be preferable to capture a realistic experience of food insecurity and give stakeholders a better indication of the situation. Nevertheless, this new food poverty measurement along with all other information that the FRS collects is key for capturing estimates of financial and material wellbeing in the UK, including what drives food insecurity.

Beyond measurements, there are attempts to understand what drives food insecurity, given the significant links between food insecurity and general poverty. While scholars argue that food insecurity is one of the manifestations of poverty (Dowler, 2002), this view must be further nuanced as those experiencing food insecurity are a heterogenous group of people of various income sources, socio-economic status and personal circumstances, all of which have played a role in their reliance on food charities. Moreover, while food access has to do with income, an increase in household income may not directly result in increased food security (Lang and Heasman, 2015). People have complex budgets and may support other

spending goals to the detriment of their food intake. Further to these differences in circumstances and budget allocations, food insecure groups tend to suffer from poor health and diet-related diseases (Marmot et al., 2010). Food insecurity and mental illnesses are correlated, and a commonality amongst people who seek charitable assistance is marginalisation from larger society (David and Collins, 2014).

1.2 Causes of food insecurity

1.2.1 Poverty, deprivation, vulnerability and social exclusion

This section discusses general poverty as a key determinant of food insecurity, and it will be followed by a discussion in the next section on two other important drivers of poverty as well as growing food insecurity in the UK, which is has been widely researched by numerous scholars (Caplan, 2019; Craig and Dowler, 1997; Garthwaite, 2016; Lambie-Mumford, 2017).

In a review of inequalities in the UK, the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) distinguishes relative from persistent poverty. The former is also known as the 'at risk of poverty' rate, where individuals are considered to be experiencing 'relative poverty' if they live in a household with an equivalised (adjusted income taking into account the size and composition of the household), disposable income below 60% of the national median in the current year (ONS, 2015). In the latter, experiencing 'persistent poverty' is defined as being in relative income poverty in the year and at least two of the three preceding years of data collection. According to the most recent ONS figures from 2017, and drawing on Eurostat data, the UK had the eighth lowest rate of persistent poverty (7.8%, roughly 4,7 million people), below the EU average of 11.3% out of twenty-eight countries (ONS, 2019). Among the EU28, prior to Brexit, persistent poverty rate in the UK was similar to France's, while the Czech Republic had the lowest rate (4.4%) and Romania the highest (19.1%). The same resource shows that 2.4 million working people were in poverty in 2017, and that four in ten persistently poor individuals experienced 'severe material deprivation', meaning they could not afford four or more items from a list of several items deemed 'essential' in ordinary modern life, including heating one's home and purchasing meals with meat, chicken, fish or a vegetarian equivalent every other day. In addition to these measures, the DWP also quantifies relative low income (compared to median income of the current year) and absolute low income

(comparison to the median income of the 2010/11 year which allows comparisons over time) using the previously mentioned annual Family Resources Survey (DWP, 2021a).

Further measures of general poverty exist, notably those distributed by the Social Metrics Commission (SMC), an independent and non-partisan organisation that has been publishing estimates since 2018 to seize the extent to which a person's resources meet their needs. The SMC developed an approach to poverty measurement to promote 'a consensus around poverty measurement and action' and contribute to interventions that might reduce the 'number of people experiencing poverty and improve outcomes for those people who do experience it' (SMC, 2020). Additionally, the House of Commons Library research service provides what they consider 'the impartial briefing and evidence base' that is needed by Members of Parliaments to support their parliamentary duties, and to produce a yearly briefing paper on poverty in the UK (Francis-Devine, 2021b). The House of Commons briefing draws on the Department of Work and Pension's 'households below average income' statistics but nevertheless emphasises that there are several ways to measure poverty and that no measure is universally accepted. Individuals may be in relative or absolute low income, and further to this distinction, income is complex to measure, with two main measures, before or after housing costs (BHC or AHC, respectively). Poverty levels are obviously higher when household levels are measured AHC (Table 1).

Table 1. Poverty – all individuals 2019/20. Source: DWP, Households Below Average Income, cited in France-Devine (2021).

Poverty- all individuals
2019/2020

	Relative poverty		Absolute poverty	
	number (millions)	%	number (millions)	%
Before housing costs	11.7	18%	9.2	14%
After housing costs	14.5	22%	11.7	18%

Measures and definitions of poverty are understandably contested because they are difficult to establish, and moreover, they are affected by numerous variables such as savings or inheritance, housing costs and average expenditure. Another important consideration is that poverty data is subject to delay which means that today's statistics refer to the previous years' events. This means that the most recent data available to any politician, policy maker and

charity does not refer to the actual situation (Panjwani, 2020). Accordingly, the impact of recent events, such as the COVID-19 pandemic will not be immediately reflected in official statistics, rather, the effects of such events can only be captured and disseminated with a delay that depends on data collection recurrence and methods.

In addition to research conducted by charities and public bodies, further studies come from academic institutions to define poverty. Sociologist Amartya Sen (1981, p.vix) writes that much is 'transparent' about 'raw' poverty and misery, as in, obvious at first glance, at least when it comes to identifying extreme poverty. Beyond that, 'the identification of the poor and the diagnosis of poverty' is complex because of wide-ranging approaches (Sen, 1981). For instance, in the ESRC-funded Poverty and Social Exclusion or PSE:UK research project conducted in the UK from 2010 to 2014, poverty refers not only to living on low income, but also to having limited access to basic necessities of life; therefore, this definition considers various measures of material and social deprivation (PSE:UK, 2016). The PSE:UK study assessed the multi-dimensional nature of poverty and, in particular, identified those who fall below what the public agrees is a minimum standard of living, or 'below the breadline' (Lansley and Mack, 2015). While the study found that the UK had become overall wealthier, it nevertheless highlighted key areas of deprivation that had grown in the last ten years. The PSE:UK's methodology has become the main instrument used to measure poverty UK-wide and has contributed to the new UN Sustainable Development Goals requirement for all countries to measure multidimensional poverty. It is also used by the European Commission to revise the official Europe 2020 (EU2020) poverty target measure, as part of their ten-year agenda for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth to overcome the structural weaknesses in Europe's economy (European Commission, 2016; Eurostat, 2020). The five targets that have been set to achieve EU2020 concern economic and environmental objectives such as employment, research and development, climate change and energy sustainability as well as social concerns such as education, the fight against poverty and social exclusion. This is an important point because it suggests that social concerns are placed on equal footing with economic objectives.

Civil society organisations have also sought to define and measure poverty. An interest in British poverty was particularly 'rediscovered' in the 1960s by the social policy researcher, campaigner and founder of the Child Poverty Action Group, Peter Townsend, for whom the

Beveridge report had not solved poverty as previously hoped (Child Poverty Action Group, 2017). For Townsend, the 'poor' referred not only to families who fell below 'the official poverty line' implied by the safety net of means-tested benefit rates (Townsend, 1979). Instead, poverty had to be understood in relation to the typical living standards in specific societies and therefore denoted a population group that lacked resources to obtain the type of diet, participate in the activities and have the living conditions and amenities which are customary or approved in their respective social infrastructure. Therefore, Townsend's definition emphasised that those regarded as 'poor' were in fact 'resource-poor' in various ways: they lack economic capital, both income and wealth, human capital such as education or good health, or social capital such that they were part of their inclusive communities. For all that, however, the decisive characteristic of poverty is lack of adequate financial resources given that it is money that determines whether people can fully participate in society and compensate for other shortfalls in their lives when needed, for instance to meet costs associated with unforeseen circumstances such as illness, redundancy or natural disaster.

While median household income poverty is the preferred poverty measure in the UK as previously discussed, some view consumption expenditure as a better measure of poverty than income. For instance, research conducted by the Institute for Fiscal Studies suggests that those on the lowest incomes do not always coincide with the group with the lowest spending habits, or those living in the severest forms of deprivation (Hood and Waters, 2017). Yet consumption data is harder to collect than information on income and it is also more prone to error. It has therefore been suggested that material deprivation can usefully complement other poverty measures, as this type of deprivation maps the consequences of long-term poverty on families rather than the immediate financial strain (Child Poverty Action Group, 2017). Composite measures such as those used by the United Nations Children's Fund to measure child well-being in affluent countries have been developed to capture the multi-dimensionality of poverty (UNICEF, 2007). Information on material conditions were included, as well as other indicators including health, education, peer and family relationships, behaviours and risks, and young people's own subjective sense of well-being. Since 2018, the World Bank has adopted a similar broadened poverty measurement based on household consumption and three non-monetary considerations that include education outcomes, access to healthcare and basic services (WB, 2021). Recommendations by the lead author and chair of the Commission on Global Poverty, the late Sir Anthony Atkinson, were incorporated

in the World Bank's development work as it strives to end poverty by 2030, in accordance with the first Sustainable Development Goal, the eradication of extreme poverty everywhere, in all its forms (WB, 2016).

In popular culture, renewed awareness of poverty has been made possible by documentaries such as *Breadline Britain Tonight (2013)*, and *Too Poor To Stay Warm (2106*), high-street incentives such as *The Big Issue* magazine, and newspapers articles over the winter months raising alarms at the increasing number of homeless individuals, estimated at one in two-hundred people (roughly equivalent to 300,000 people in the UK) according to the homelessness charity Shelter (Butler, 2017a). The topic of poverty tends to feature alongside terms including social exclusion, limited income, deprivation, inequality, misery, precarity, 'precariat', homelessness, austerity, political exclusion as well as poor health and hunger. An example of this is the *Black Report*, an inquiry into the inequalities in health by the scholars Douglas Black, Jerry Morris and Peter Townsend under Labour government in the late 1970s (SHA, 2005). While disregarded by the subsequent conservative government, the *Black Report* as well as other documentations of food poverty such as *The Acheson Report* (Acheson, 1997) and the *Fair society, Healthy Lives Marmot Review* (Marmot et al., 2010) contributed to an awareness of the real impact of the lack of food on health, adding to other social determinants such as income, education and social status.

Of importance to this thesis is the paradox underlying the study of poverty and poor nutrition, as identified by the United Nation's Food and Agriculture Organisation: '[w]hile poverty is undoubtedly a cause of hunger, lack of adequate and proper nutrition itself is an underlying cause of poverty' (EC-FAO, 2008). This view is shared by the journalist Mark Bittman from the Union of Concerned Scientists, who argued that the notion of feeding the nine billion of people on Earth is a distraction from the real cause behind hunger and malnutrition, namely, poverty (Athanasis, 2017). Twenty years ago, food poverty scholar Elizabeth Dowler (2002, p. 712) already deplored the lack of framework for addressing the triad of low income, food poverty and health disparities in the UK. Responsibility for food poverty falls on 'poor' individuals who are expected to find solutions to their plight that is largely restricted to the private sphere (Dowler, 2002). Today, there is a growing recognition that the causes of hunger are insufficient household income and inadequate social safety net (EHUK, 2019) both

of which were exacerbated by austerity measures in the late 2018 and following the introduction of the Universal Credit, as will be discussed in the next section.

1.2.2 Austerity and welfare reform in the UK

In the last decade, high levels of unemployment across Europe, increasing housing and fuel costs as well as significant welfare reform have contributed to an ever-growing need for emergency food provision for many households and families (Hall, 2015). Despite disagreements in the academic literature, the role of socio-economic structures in driving food insecurity is generally accepted, and in particular economic security such as income level and cost of living (Lambie-Mumford and O'Connell, 2015; Dowler and Caraher, 2003; Caraher and Furey, 2018). Wide-ranging reforms in the UK occurred in the context of the global mid-2000 economic crash and the recession that followed. Furthermore, these reforms coincided with an historical trajectory of the welfare state since the 1970s, and more so with the Labour Government's development of a more professionalised voluntary sector (Lambie-Mumford, 2017). 'Welfare austerity' refers to this programme of extensive cuts to services delivered by the welfare state and extensive reforms to social security.

Public policies, namely austerity measures following the 2008 financial crisis, and the Welfare Reform Act 2012 with the roll-out of the Universal credit, have adversely affected determinants of food insecurity (Lambie-Mumford and Dowler, 2015). In their report on the increasing occurrence of food banks and associated provision of emergency food aid, the All-Party Parliamentary Inquiry into Hunger in the United Kingdom found that welfare policies along with the rise of insecure work in the form of zero hour contracts and other low-pay work have further exacerbated food insecurity since the early 2000s (All-Party Parliamentary Inquiry, 2014). The All-Party Parliamentary Inquiry into Hunger, made up of parliamentarians and non-governmental organisation representatives who reviewed food insecurity prior to the introduction of the new benefits system, estimated that one quarter of people relying on food bank parcels were in low paid work in 2014, with many clients reporting that the then National Minimum Wage was not sufficient to live on. The same inquiry cited benefit related-problems such as delayed payments, sanctions and misinformation among claimants as the main reason for food bank referrals (All-Party Parliamentary Inquiry, 2014). At the time, vulnerable individuals were deemed particularly affected by sanctions because they are more

likely to lack digital skills or have mobility issues, and therefore prone to resorting to emergency food aid when sanctions were applied, and benefits delayed or suddenly stopped.

Welfare reform with the introduction the Universal Credit (UC) in 2013 by the Conservative and Liberal Democrat Coalition Government aimed to 'make the benefit system fairer and more affordable', 'reduce poverty, worklessness and welfare dependency' and 'reduce levels of fraud and error' (GovUK, 2015). Regrettably, the roll-out of UC has not been without issues and commentators have criticised it for further complicating the application process, leading to even more sanctions and delays than previously (Caraher and Furey, 2018). Efficiency savings as well as changes in entitlement by either freezing or capping benefits, for instance out-of-work benefits (Jobseeker's allowance) have been found to provide even less than the income needed to achieve a minimum standard of living than they did prior to the introduction of the UC (Lambie-Mumford, 2017, p.118).

Welfare reform occurred alongside reductions in finance to public services which considerably affected social and other commissioned local services such as homeless shelters. By 2020, government core funding to local authorities will have been reduced by £16 billion over the previous decade, leading to unavoidable budget cuts to absorb funding shortfall (Local Government Association, 2018). Councils spend less on adult and children's social care and other services such as rural bus routes or libraries, and they have reduced their support for the voluntary sector. Individuals and households that are disproportionately affected by austerity measures are more likely to live in poverty than the rest of the population: children, pensioners, disabled people, ethnic minorities, women and lone-parent households (WBG, 2018). And in the absence of preventative and support systems, the Local Government Association (2018) predicts worse outcomes for at-risk of poverty individuals resulting in acute needs that will not be met, struggling families, reduced social mobility and an overall negative impact on the health of the population. These short-term cuts therefore constitute 'a false economy' because immediate budget savings may indirectly contribute to increased hospital admissions, higher crimes rates and homelessness (Local Government Association, 2018, p.8). The charities Church Action on Poverty and Oxfam blamed the failure of the social safety net in ensuring sufficient income to meet basic needs, and they foresaw a worsening of food insecurity for the poorest with the introduction of the UC (Cooper and Dumpleton, 2013). The year-on-year increases in food bank parcel handouts are a testimony to the growing demand

for vital emergency sustenance (The Trussell Trust, 2021). Reductions and retractions in the welfare state are only one of various determinants of food insecurity according to Caraher and Furey (2018, p. 22), the other ones being increases in poverty levels, higher basic costs (food, utilities and housing) and 'a view of modern poverty as a lifestyle issue'. Increases in poverty levels were detailed in a previous section whereas the 'view of modern poverty as a lifestyle issue' will be detailed in section 2.2 below.

2. Confronting food insecurity: food aid and food justice

2.1 Emergency food systems and charitable food provisioning

2.1.1 Definition and scale

In a review of food aid commissioned by the UK's Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, Lambie-Mumford and colleagues (2014, p. 15) define food aid as 'an umbrella term encompassing a range of large-scale and small local activities aiming to help people meet food needs, often on a short-term basis during crisis or immediate difficulty; more broadly they contribute to relieving symptoms of household or individual-level food insecurity and poverty'. Further to this generic definition, food aid is a term that refers to both emergency and non-emergency food assistance (Power et al., 2017) and independent or networked structures (Lambie-Mumford et al., 2014). Emergency food assistance includes, then, independent food banks or The Trussell Trust's foodbanks, soup kitchens, soup runs or mobile handouts. Non-emergency provision comprises community cafes, surplus cafes, food co-operatives, community gardens or supermarkets (Kirkpatrick and Tarasuk, 2009, p.138). By definition, the latter do not respond to an immediate need to alleviate hunger, unlike emergency food charities that provide food at no to little cost to individuals who have no to low or irregular sources of income. Independent charities are not franchised (unlike the Trussell Trust foodbanks) but they may be members of an organisation such as the Independent Food Aid Network (IFAN) (IFAN, 2022). Lastly, food aid providers are defined as either formal because they only serve referred clients from medical or other approved professionals, or they are informal, and do not require referrals (Sosenko et al., 2013, p. 6).

This present study focuses on informal food aid providers that give a free meal to the community and those in need of food assistance, but it does not consider food banks, which

have been largely studied elsewhere (Caplan, 2020, 2017; Dowler and Lambie-Mumford, 2014; Garthwaite, 2016; Husbands, 1999; Lambie-Mumford, 2017). Informal food aid providers refer to themselves as community kitchens, charities, cafes or initiatives that rely on donated food and meals from the public or the catering industry, or that redistribute surplus from retailers. Few charities use the label 'soup kitchen' (Sosenko et. al, 2013), most probably due to the largely negative historical connotations of the term where recipients of soup kitchens are deemed in need of 'poor relief'. This connotation possibly dates back to the provision of aid by the Society of Friends, or Quakers, to the distressed following the 1845 potato famine, where 'soup-kitchens' were established 'as a means of relieving the poor of Dublin' and other Irish districts (O'Neill, 1950, p.206). A brief history of collective dining will be presented in a subsequent section of this chapter.

Nowadays, food charities respond to a fluctuating demand for aid in urban centres, hence the complexity inherent to any attempt at describing their scale and reach. Personal information about service users is not collected for legal reasons, and to preserve the anonymity of individuals who rely on food handouts as last resort to feed themselves. Charities may keep unofficial records of numbers of service users, but since they do not require referrals from accredited professionals, they do not know the exact demography of their service users, and they furthermore do not compile statistics. While there are currently no official statistics that provide an overview of informal food aid recipients, data from the largest food banks are helpful in quantifying trends in food aid need. In that respect, a study of Scottish food providers found that the rise in clients reported by the Trussell Trust mirrors that of all parcel services and soup kitchens, which lead to the conclusion that official Trussell Trust data might be indicative of other food providers' demand and overall situation with regards to food insecurity (Sosenko et al., 2013, p.2). The aforementioned review of food aid by Lambie-Mumford et al. (2014) noted an upward trend in demand for all formal and informal food aid providers by individuals requesting food during data collection (February to March 2013), and by those who had been relying on food aid for a long period. Drivers of this increase are the consequence of 'crises in a range of circumstances' such reduction in 'household income, and often underpinned by on-going problems of low income, rising food (and other) costs and increasing indebtedness', which might in turn explain growing numbers of food aid providers (Lambie-Mumford et al., 2014, p.13). A key 2013 briefing commissioned by the charities Church Action on Poverty and Oxfam, *Walking the Breadline*, estimated that half a million people rely

on emergency food aid in the UK, and it predicted increases in the coming years at the time of publication (Cooper and Dumpleton, 2013), which is a statement that held true years later, as discussed in section 1.2.2 on austerity and welfare reform; see below for more on these more current changes and circumstances in food aid need and provision.

Most recent IFAN estimates provide an incomplete albeit valuable overview of informal food aid use. Their 2020 data point to the existence of 1052 independent food banks as well as 1393 Trussell Trust foodbanks, to also include 'food banks run by schools, universities and hospitals and any Salvation Army food parcel distributors' (IFAN, 2020). Additional emergency or immediate food distribution venues account for approximately 3,000 independent food aid providers across the UK, as seen below in figure 1. These figures matter because they indicate a nation-wide presence of providers that give food 'in a variety of ways' in their communities. Furthermore, such attempts at quantifying food aid providers help inform debates on food poverty in the UK without the need to rely on the Trussell Trust's official statistics, which only expose a fraction of the problem.

Figure 1. IFAN Members Organisations. Source: IFAN, 2020.

The issue with getting an estimate of those who are in food poverty is that individuals address food insecurity in various ways. Research suggest that most resort to food aid only when they

have exhausted other key strategies such as seeking help from friends and family, changing their shopping and eating habits, or refraining from spending money on non-essential items (Lambie-Mumford et al., 2014). In that respect, the majority of the food insecure turn to emergency food aid as last resort (Dowler, 2014), especially to informal community initiatives that do not require any proof of entitlement. Drawing on key research conducted by Janet Poppendieck (1998) and Graham Riches (2002), Lambie-Mumford and Dowler (2015) compared European contexts to that of North America during the 1980 recession. Rising levels of unemployment and increasingly scant social welfare support led the ground for the proliferation of food charities in the US, a situation comparable to austerity in Europe, which inevitably led to a similar outcome (Lambie-Mumford and Dowler, 2015), as discussed in a previous section (1.2.2). It is therefore unsurprising that informal emergency charitable food initiatives, such as community kitchens, have grown in number to meet increasing hardship and food insecurity in large portions of the UK population.

2.1.2 Collective or community kitchens

2.1.2.1 Brief history

The soup kitchen was a prominent feature of Georgian and Victorian times. Grain prices often fluctuated with bad harvests, which particularly affected unskilled labourers, the unemployed and poor. Soup is affordable, warm and nutritious, easy to prepare in large quantities and therefore an ideal meal for the destitute especially in cold weather. The historian Philip Carstairs documents the establishment of soup kitchens by Huguenots in Spitalfields, London, to the thousands of poor Londoners who were affected by the decline of the silk-weaving industry in the eighteenth century (Carstairs, 2017). As previously mentioned, in accordance with their tradition of philanthropy the Quakers established 'soup-kitchens' in Ireland to alleviate hunger following the potato crop failure of 1845. Low-priced soup was offered along with bread and later on cooked rice to address increasing occurrences of digestive complaints such as dysentery (O'Neill, 1950). Assistance was given the most destitute irrespective of religion which was even more remarkable in those famine years marked by the highly infectious typhus fever, and furthermore, the Quakers' initiative went beyond the alleviation of immediate distress by also tending to the root cause of poverty in Ireland, the system of land tenure (ibid.). Concurrently in England, the Quaker educator and shopkeeper Joseph Rowntree Senior opened the York Soup Kitchen in the winter of 1845-46, and his son John

Rowntree Junior subsequently set up eponymous trusts in 1904 to not only alleviate immediate poverty and injustice, but also to address the root causes of poverty (Rowntree Society, n.d.). Today, while the Joseph Rowntree trusts no longer runs kitchens, they fund major UK-wide research and development programmes to ensure social change, with the reduction of food insecurity and food poverty a major focus of their work.

Feeding people proved especially important in times of unrest Europe-wide. The scholar Bryce Evans has conducted extensive research on war-time kitchens that constituted an important 'communal feeding programme' in 20th century Britain. The Ministry of Food originally oversaw national kitchens in WWI, which were later named 'Kitchens for All' and then 'National Kitchens' by Winston Churchill for whom the concept of 'communal feeding centres' was too evocative of communism and the workhouse (Evans, 2018, p.115). These kitchens aimed for cross-class cultural appeal and were run like businesses in the Great War. From 'soup kitchens' for poor people, they gradually became restaurants where ordinary people could purchase affordable meals. Just before the start of the WW1, kitchens were 'popular ventures rather than schemes solely for the very poor' but for all that, they ceased to operate as restaurants following the post-war downsizing of the Ministry of Food, only to be revived in the next war (Evans, 2017, p.128). While national kitchens were particularly needed during the two Wars, demand for cheap and nutritious dining was still widespread in post-wars periods. National kitchens were nevertheless abandoned due to lack of political will when WW2 ended. Importantly, Carstairs (2017, p.932) notes that the 'process of receiving soup, once the poor had passed the test of whether they were deserving, was laborious and dehumanizing' and nineteenth century kitchens were punitive, marginalised institutions that 'assumed the worst of the poor, that they were drinkers and lazy and would exploit the system if they could'.

Yet, for all their shortcomings, national kitchens served important functions. Not only did these state-run kitchens provide much-needed sustenance during dire times but for Evans (2017), they also came along with cultural parameters such as culinary, social, and political. In that respect, Charles Spencer, head of the new division of the Ministry of Food dedicated to mass dining, sought to instil a cross-cultural appeal to national kitchens, ensuring kitchens were popular ventures rather than 'class kitchens' aimed exclusively at the very poor (Evans, 2017, p. 120). The dining experience mattered, meals were not free but attractive and cheap

for all to purchase; it was an experience in 'egalitarian eating' (Evans, 2017, p. 126) that was nevertheless halted by the implementation of a comprehensive rationing system soon after the start of the Great War. In a 2015 article for *The Conversation,* Evans argued for a revival of communal dining to alleviate food poverty through subsidised cafes for people to acquire cheap nutritious meals, or learn to prepare food (Evans, 2015). Moreover, for him, communal eating might help 'combat problems borne of social dislocation, depression and loneliness' since '[i]ntangibles such as mental turmoil are surprisingly easily targeted via simply sitting down and breaking bread' (Evans, 2015). Today, community kitchens have been revived by civil society to not only meet the growing need for food assistance among the vulnerable and economically marginalised, but to also to build communities by bringing people together from various backgrounds, as suggested by the South Norwood Community Kitchen (SNCK, 2020).

2.1.2.2 Existing literature on contemporary community kitchens

I begin by reviewing existing research on community kitchens—much of it coming from research conducted in Australia and Canada—before moving on to UK-based research. The varied terminology employed by researchers and stakeholders particularly leads to confusion when reviewing the literature. I previously reviewed definitions of emergency and non-emergency food systems in section 2.1.1 where I exposed the multifaceted nature of food aid. I emphasised the urgency conveyed by the term 'emergency food aid' and I specified the various forms in which this emergency food provisioning occurs, via formal charities and other groups, such as food banks, school breakfasts, soup runs, community fridges, surplus cafes and community kitchens. 'Charitable food programs or provisioning' or 'food charities' are therefore concepts that refer to a wide range of initiatives, and not necessarily community kitchens, which is the focus of this research project. I aimed to narrow down my search to community kitchens, that is, organisations that hand free food and serve cooked meals to the vulnerable and that provide communal, sitting space to consume the food on-site. The situation was exceptional during the COVID-19 pandemic given that community kitchens were constrained to operate as food handouts by distributing food and meals outside of their premises in accordance with strict public health guidelines that forbad indoor gatherings.

Rebecca Lindberg and colleagues (2015, 2017) conducted a review of research relevant to Australian charitable food programs that included food banks, more than three thousands community agencies and eight hundred school breakfast programs over a four-year period in

order to expose the potential and limits of the charitable food sector (Lindberg et al., 2015, 2017). Drawing on the right to food framework, Lindberg et al. conducted a qualitative study of volunteers at Australian food charities to explore how alternative community and policy food security strategies might contribute to safer, more nutritious and affordable food. Their main finding was that emergency food relief only provides food for a minority of the population in need, hence only marginally and unsatisfactorily tackles food insecurity. In a second instance, Fridman and Lenters (2013) identified kitchens as potential food hubs whose service provides a myriad of community benefits such as the promotion of food security. Their research sought to evaluate the work of the municipal government of Toronto through their urban food policy strategy, but does it not explore the impact of the kitchen on its users (Fridman and Lenters, 2013).

Additional Canadian research by Rachel Engler-Stringer and Shawna Berenbaum, who used similar methods to those of Lindberg et al. (2017), is relevant to this dissertation as it also explored participants' perceptions of food security following their involvement in a collective kitchen. Data from participant observation and interviews revealed recipients of food aid experienced an increase in food security while others mentioned that their fear of lacking money to buy food had not subsided, and in that sense, they still felt food insecure. Despite the overall positive outcome of participants' participation in community kitchens, the researchers concluded that these endeavours were by no means 'a long-term solution to the income-related food insecurity experienced by many Canadian families' (Engler-Stringer and Berenbaum, 2005). Similarly, quantitative research by Valerie Tarasuk and Sharon Kirkpatrick (2009) found that responses to food insecurity in the form of community-based programs (including community kitchens) did not sufficiently reach low-income households. Their findings point to issues with the food programs' relevance and accessibility given that 'initiatives are reaching only a small proportion of those in need and are unable to compensate for the inadequacy of their household incomes' (Kirkpatrick and Tarasuk, 2009, p.138).

Little research has been conducted on community kitchens in the UK; this study fills a substantial gap in this regard. Two key studies, however, do stand out and are built upon here. First, an important paper by Madeleine Power and colleagues conceptualised 'community food aid' by alluding to food assistance providers in the northern England city of Bradford. Their study gives invaluable insights into the different types of food aid providers, their

similarities, points of tensions and their ways of responding to food insecurity (Power et al., 2017). The emphasis is placed on faith-based organisations, mainly Muslim and Christian charities, and how they interact with people or 'clients' of different faiths and other secular organisations. Power et al., similar to Kirkpatrick and Tarasuk (2009), question the accessibility of food aid, especially in a time where communities are increasingly marked by multiculturalism and multiple faiths, thus not all those in the community are being served or supported with food insecurity issues. Second, in their detailed review of food aid in Scotland, Sosenko and colleagues (2013) note the various types of food aid providers, their overall rise in attendance and, importantly, the particularities of service users according to type of provider. In their report, food aid is delivered by a broad range of third sector organisations that include food banks, venues where charities provide food such as hostels, community cafes or day centres, and national redistribution charities. Their findings suggest that most users of food banks were housed but had little income, and most users of Trussell Trust foodbanks tended to require parcels due to 'a one-off crisis' (Sosenko et al., 2013). Conversely, users of other forms of food aid, for instance community kitchens, experienced long-standing problems such as addiction, poor mental health or homelessness and were more 'chronic' users of these services to access to food. This study identifies the gaps filled by community initiatives and it also points to challenges when tracking how formal and informal organisations meet the growing demand for food aid. Identifying providers, as noted by Sosenko et al. (2013, p. 6), proved complex due to the 'dynamic' nature of the food aid landscape which meant that numbers of providers and recipients greatly varied over a short period of time. Further, the wide-ranging ways in which food aid was conceptualised by the above-mentioned researchers adds a layer of complexity to any attempt at defining and reporting on the phenomenon. These considerations will be addressed in greater depth in the Chapter Three of this thesis, where I discuss the types and scale of food aid providers that were included in this study under the term 'Twilight Food Networks (TFNs)'.

2.2 Criticism of emergency food systems

While the emergency food system alleviates hunger in the short-term among the most vulnerable, as illustrated in studies described in the previous section, various aspects of the charitable food system have come under scrutiny. Naturally, food banks being the most researched type of emergency food provider, they are also subject to criticism by academic researchers and other critics. Criticism of emergency food providers more generally pertains

to their lack of inclusivity (Engler-Stringer and Berenbaum, 2005; Loopstra, 2018a; Power et al., 2017), inability to address long term food insecurity and role in masking the real causes of hunger (Caraher and Furey, 2018). Worse, for some scholars, the use of surplus for emergency food aid has led the public to perceive the redistribution of surplus as a solution to closing the gap between income and food costs, and in so doing, has depoliticised hunger (Caraher and Furey, 2017). This practice hinders any action to reduce surplus food and tackle drivers of food insecurity because charitable outlets are portrayed as life-saving endeavours. Hannah Lambie-Mumford (2018, p. 115) identifies an 'ideological divide' with food banks being 'celebrated as a communitarian response in the context of individualised risk', and at the same time, food banks are seen 'as a symbol for the failure of the welfare state'. Accordingly, recent shifts from social security benefits to charity is problematic because it indicates that the levels of entitlement as well as relevant administrative processes are neither adequate nor sufficient to prevent food insecurity (Lambie-Mumford, 2018, p. 131).

During the Covid-19 pandemic, the allocation of direct public funds from central government to food banks as well as the launch of local authority emergency grants for food and essential supplies was analogous to acknowledging that existing emergency food aid could best respond to the food crisis. Reporter Jem Bartholomew (2020) claimed that these grants were 'akin the government admitting that its benefits aren't enough to live on' because food banks had never received formalised state support prior to the pandemic. While it might be argued that the recent pandemic was a particularly trying period for governments and agri-food systems—and importantly the poor and marginalised—it is worth mentioning that the Covid-19 crisis only pushed more people into food insecurity, which pre-pandemic had already affected an estimated 14m people living in poverty according to the Social Metrics Commission (2020). The UK government does not formally fund food banks but it nevertheless indirectly supported food aid providers by encouraging applications to various COVID-19 state grants, and for some, 'by allowing the worsening of food insecurity' due to social security cuts and insecure work (Bartholomew, 2020). On their 'frequently asked questions' webpage, the largest network of UK food banks is vague about whether it receives state support but it presents the act of volunteering for a local food bank as something that makes 'a real difference in people's lives' (The Trussell Trust, 2022b). Bartholomew offers a nuanced view about volunteering and donating to food banks by arguing that these activities

have now become synonymous with being a good citizen and normalised both the need and expansion of food aid.

Another source of controversy concerns the strong links between food charities and the food industry, with issues of institutionalisation and corporatisation widely discussed in the food aid literature in the UK (Caraher and Furey, 2018) and North America (Fisher, 2017; Poppendieck, 1999; Riches, 1997). Concerns about the problematic embeddedness of food charities in American civil society has been brought to the forefront by the activist and scholar Andy Fisher (2017, p. 262), whose experience in the anti-hunger field as the executive director of national and local food groups has led him to the conclusion that 'anti-hunger organizations' are part of an 'hunger industrial complex' that 'is grounded in practices that perpetuate the current inadequate system, and along with it the problem of hunger itself'. Developed out of his work in the US, anti-hunger organisations reliant on corporate donations of food and money have helped shape the emergency food system into a self-perpetuating anti-hunger industry and furthermore, they contribute to maintaining the status-quo for businesses and governments by diverting attention away from an important driver of hunger: economic inequality driven by low wages. Fisher (2017, p.39) advocates redefining the anti-hunger field by focusing on the intersection at community level of health, hunger, economic development and agriculture because, in his words, 'many of the problems with the hunger concept relate to the ineffective solutions it promotes'. To remake the anti-hunger field and fully address food insecurity, initiatives ought to aim for at least one of three goals without impeding on the other two: economic justice, healthy people and/or democratic food systems. In that vein, hunger would not be seen as a problem to be sold by the private or third sector, but one that requires a holistic approach with social change at its core.

Similar to Fisher, Christian Möller has criticised the links between food charities and supermarkets that enable and strenghten the on-going institutionalisation of corporate food aid (Möller, 2019, 2022). He especially contests the embedeness of corporate partnerships and food banks' marketing campaigns in public places, such as Tesco's offer to 'top up' all food donations to the Trussel Trust, which in his view contribute to the normalisation of charity practices. Supermarket food collections are celebrated as acts of charity in the community and highlight receivers' lack of access to food but not the structural determinants of food poverty, namely low income, rising living costs or unequal distribution of wealth.

Möller denounces 'the spectacle of food charity' where 'social problems are made into marketable opportunities and positive experiences to be consumed' and poverty relief portrayed as a commodity that gives the impression that those in need have access to food thanks to generous donors (supermarkets and the public) and kind volunteers (Möller, 2019). The dual spectacles of consumption and food charity is beneficial to corporations but highly problematic in terms of how poverty is seen by the public, experienced by those in need, and addressed by stakeholders. Drawing on ethnography conducted at Tesco supermarkets collections in partnership with the Trussell Trust and FareShare nationwide, Möller recalls the volunteers' guidelines and expectations of conduct, which discouraged any political debate with shoppers (Möller, 2022). Citing personal safety concerns, the FareShare manual suggested volunteers did not engage with 'difficult customers' and instead sought support from supermarket staff. The manual constructs the experience of volunteering as a fun activity that does not require long-term commitment, and furthermore, it constructs shoppers who may wish to debate, voice their refusal to donate or walk by without interacting as 'difficult', 'too busy' or on the contrary, useful-citizen-consumer who 'help feed people in need' (Möller, 2022, p.101). This example clearly shows ways in which food poverty is depoliticised and packaged as part of corporate social responsibility endeavours that highlight the favourable role of volunteers, rather than the issue of food poverty itself.

In this dissertation, Chapter Four describes digital food activism and engages with the issues discussed in this section, most notably how charitable giving and feeding the hungry is made visible on social media platforms. The next section of the literature review discusses an alternative to the current model of food aid, through a discussion of initiatives that operate within the food justice movement.

2.3 Movements for food justice in wealthy countries

The concept of food security is associated with the food justice framework, which advocates 'equity and justice in agri-food networks by attending to how these networks are raced, classed and gendered, and situated within broader power privilege relations at multiple scales' (Hughes, 2010, p.32). The food justice movement builds on the access and self-sufficiency concerns within food security and food sovereignty respectively, to reveal structural discrimination based on class, race and gender. This discourse has emerged from the environmental justice agenda and spread to more recent alternative agri-food networks,

in the aim to secure 'just urban food' for all to incorporate ideals of justice into the issue of declining retail food accessibility for low-income urban communities at a time when food systems are increasingly globalized and commodified (Bedore, 2010). In this context, the aims of food justice are threefold: (i) challenge and restructure the dominant food system; (ii) providing a core focus on equity and disparities and the struggles by those who are most vulnerable; (iii) establishing linkages and common goals with other forms of social justice activism and advocacy (Gottlieb and Joshi, 2013). Food justice as a social, economic, and political concern encompasses considerations within alternative food movements and environmental rights that aligns themselves with the aims of social justice which involve 'meeting basic human needs, freedom from exploitation and oppression, and access to opportunity and participation' (Allen, 2008, p.157). Activism for greater food justice addresses the disproportionate burdens of structural and environmental barriers to food experienced by low-income communities and ethnic minorities.

At the local level, community food justice provides a space for participative food justice by linking individuals and institutions across various geographies, which further helps connect place and power. Applied to the food security approach, the concept of food justice can contribute to the creation of more democratic and inclusive food politics (Moragues-Faus, 2017, p.105). The model of food justice seeks to 'ensur[e] that the benefits and risks of where, what, and how food is grown and produced, transported and distributed, accessed and eaten are shared fairly' (Gottlieb and Joshi, 2013, p.6). This concept encourages anti-hunger charities to look for long term and systemic approaches to tackling the root causes of hunger, rather than deliver short-term food access (Moragues-Faus, 2017). It also considers excesses in the form of surplus food that cannot be retailed, and talks to the paradox of abundance on the one hand, and food poverty on the other (Sharpe, 2016). Yet, unlike initiatives within the food sovereignty movement, food justice initiatives do not aim for self-sufficiency and they do not campaign for communities' rights to produce their own food and break away from the agri-food system (Alkon and Mares, 2012). The latter is subject to criticism because by not embracing a food sovereignty approach, both food justice and food security movements do not explicitly opposes neoliberalism, and they do not fundamentally alter the sources of injustices in the global corporate food regime (Alkon and Mares, 2012, p.357).

While emergency food systems in the form of community kitchens aim to address injustices in the system, they nevertheless do not tend to address systemic injustices that drive food insecurity. Therefore, similar to criticism of emergency food programs, food justice initiatives might be criticised for having individual responsibility, self-help and market mechanisms as focal points, all of which further shift responsibility away from the state (Guthman, 2008). In this context, scholars argue that these programs fail to provide for those who lack economic means in a choice-based marked, they vilify the 'undeserving poor' who are dependent on 'free food' and by promoting the dominance of ideologies of individualism, the poor 'are not only deprived materially but also demoralized politically and psychologically' (Allen, 2004, p.125). Additional criticism concerns the increasingly blurred semantic boundaries between concepts that designate initiatives within the alternative and the local food movements. Some find faults with the overuse of the term 'food justice' that is used interchangeably with various types of food initiatives towards an equitable food system, for instance communal gardens, farmers markets, worm bins or city farms, which might render the term as meaningless as empty signifiers on food packaging (e.g. cruelty free or ethically sourced), and crucially, it might undermine the credibility of food justice practices (Cadieux and Slocum, 2015, p.15). Some warn that food justice 'has begun to be folded into neoliberization processes through state involvement and an underlying assumption that food injustice can be solved by private market forces' (Agyeman and Mcentee, 2014, p.211), similar to critiques of AFNs, discussed in the next section, where scholars denounce aspects of alternative food activities that are increasingly marked by neoliberal aims and consumer-driven practices (Allen and Guthman, 2006).

Counter to the above-discussed views, US-based research by Charles Levkoe finds that food justice movements are increasingly bridging the gap between people, their source of food and nutrition, and furthermore, they are serving as places for actively learning democratic citizenship (Levkoe, 2006, p.96). While engagements with collective food endeavours by members of the public neither alter the agri-food system nor solve the challenges of food insecurity, they nevertheless increase participants' level of political efficacy, knowledge, and skill at the local level, and can directly challenge food policies more widely. In a recent paper, Levkoe and colleagues (2020) call for greater efforts to challenge the underlying systems that produce injustices and commit to radical social change by going beyond localised attempts at changing the food system. One of the authors of the paper, Ricardo Salvador from the Union

of Concerned Scientists, deplores the agri-food sector that is akin to what he calls the 'Nike food system' whereby 'you should just eat it- and not worry about how food is produced, who benefits or what is ultimately does to you' (Levkoe et al., 2020, p.296). For Salvador, an important aspect of endeavours towards building a more just food system requires the reduction of structural racism in northern American food systems, a pre-requisite to an inclusive and representative economy.

In relation to systemic racism, Slocum and Cadieux (2015) refer to the importance of antiracist activism within the US-based food justice movement. Grounded in civil rights and environmental justice, racial equity holds a central place in the US food movement as evidenced by the work of numerous scholars (Alkon and Agyeman, 2011; Alkon and Norgaard, 2009; Myers and Sbicca, 2015; Slocum, 2007; Slocum and Cadieux, 2015). Overall, UK food justice movements build on the notion of the right to food and argue that 'communities and citizens (particularly those most marginalised by the current food system) should have a central and fundamental role in tackling food injustice 'from the ground up'' (Kneafsey et al., 2017, p.261). This body of critical scholarship advocates a rights-based approach to solve food poverty in the UK, along with various other scholars for whom adequate access to food is paramount to the realisation of human rights (Caraher and Dowler, 2014; Caraher and Furey, 2018; Dowler and Lambie-Mumford, 2014; Dowler and O'Connor, 2011; Riches, 2018). The right to food approach emphasises access to acceptable and sustainable food along with the responsibility of states to ensure and safeguard the human right to food (Lambie-Mumford, 2017, p.4). Likewise, organisations within the food justice movement seek more equitable and just relations within food systems by challenging structural constraints (Herman et al., 2018) but they also encourage 'the development of strong civic virtues and critical perspectives along with the necessary experience for shaping policy makers' decisions' (Levkoe, 2006, p.90). By building skills and knowledge of all those involved, Levkoe (2006) argues that food justice activism can empower people, and potentially lead to political efficacy as well as stronger local communities even though it might not solve the problem of food insecurity in the short term.

In summary, the food justice movement directly benefits recipients by alleviating their experience of food insecurity, and in that sense, contributes to poverty alleviation. Initiatives within the movement are spaces that offer skills and opportunities for all participants to

engage in social change through innovative uses of community organising and empowerment around food provision. Food justice activism is wide-ranging, but its central premise is that in partnership with local communities it can target food insecure, culturally diverse and marginalized individuals to promote human rights, equal opportunity, and fair treatment for all. The next section will situate food justice movements within the umbrella concept of alternative food networks and point to the potential of second generation alternative initiatives as practices of care.

3. Reconnecting people and food with Alternative Food Networks

3.1 Definition and geography

The alternative food movement or network, born out of dissatisfaction with the industrial food system (Goodman et al., 2010) initially manifested itself as a diverse network that included organic farming, fair-trade network, and other activities in support of local agriculture and sustainable food consumption (Jarosz, 2014; Potter, 1996). Initiatives within Alternative Food Networks (AFNs) challenge political and economic structures that control the mainstream food system and advocate for environmentally, economically, and socially just food systems (Allen et al., 2003). Though AFNs encompasses a wide range of initiatives, it refers overall to oppositional endeavours to conventional agri-food systems. Placed-based and socially embedded alternative food practices are marked by the 'quality turn', that is, a shift from industrial food circuits 'with [their] heavily standardized quality conventions and logic of mass commodity production' to food circuits 'where quality conventions embedded in trust, tradition and place support more differentiated, localized and 'ecological' products and forms of economic organization' (Goodman, 2003, p.1). This relatively new interest concerns organisational activities at the margins of mainstream industrial food systems that built on transformative imperatives born out of left-wing politics and past solidarity movements. An example is Fair Trade, a global movement set up to ensure better pay and fairer working conditions for producers and farmers (Faitrade Foundation, 2022). Such efforts towards alternatives to the conventional practices, discourses and institutions of the contemporary agri-food system have been led by movements for sustainable agriculture and community food security to create a food system that is 'more environmentally sound, economically viable and socially just' (Allen, 2004). Recent increases in alternative agri-food activities have their origins in the 1960 'back to the land' cultural movement in Europe and in

the US. These developed in parallel with the growing distrust of late 1990s modernist perspectives where the environmental and socioeconomic externalities of conventional, chemical-intensive, monoculture agri-food system such as malnutrition, obesity, food safety scandals, food deserts, animal welfare, farm worker marginalization and systematic rural depopulation had reached a pivotal point (Constance et al., 2014, p.21).

While the alternative food movement is involved in the process of creating different economic practices and approaches around food, it has been criticised for responding to the needs of upper classes and not to those experiencing food insecurity, and thus pricing out segments of the population (Allen, 1999; Guthman, 2008). Further, as identified by Adam Pine (2017, p. 44), a problematic aspect of alternative economy projects concerns the overwhelming ideological and discursive power of the neoliberal and 'workfarist' state which constrain their operations. The coined concept of 'workfare' refers to welfare-to-work initiatives that have emerged in the US, as a response to Bill Clinton's efforts to 'end welfare as we know it', an ideology subsequently exported to the UK with John Major's 'Community Action' scheme in 1993, replaced by Tony Blair's New Labour's 'New Deal' (Peck, 2001). After the 2010 general elections, the Conservative-Liberal Government launched the PM David Cameron's 'Big Society' project which sought to address the dividing issue of inequality in British society (Espiet-Kilty, 2016). The Big Society ideology built on New Labour's support of social programmes by empowering citizens to come together and respond to social, political and economic challenges in Britain under the premise that 'we are all in this together' (Cabinet Office, 2010). While a well-meaning ideology rooted in compassionate conservatism, Big Society presented conflicting messages: it argued that help from the government left beneficiaries helpless, but at the same time called for citizens to volunteer their time and money to assist those in need. For Espiet-Kilty (2016, p.5), Big Society was 'only a smokescreen to hide massive spending cuts especially in the area of welfare' as shown by neoliberal solutions to poverty that were brough forward, such as cuts in council tax benefits or the abolition of the education maintenance allowance. Up to its demise in 2015, the Big Society discourse encouraged citizens to look after themselves and furthermore, the project shifted responsibility for poverty relief to the voluntary sector in the hope of turning individuals into 'active citizens' in Cameron's Big Society project.

Today, citizens including those in hardship are still encouraged to be pro-active in their efforts towards their reinsertion into the labour market and accept to 'work for benefits' for a public company or a charity, choosing activities such as rehabilitation, community work or training. Compulsory programs and requirements for welfare recipients aimed to increase work participation and reduce 'dependence' on welfare (Peck, 2001). At first glance this 'work-first' approach makes good sense, seeing that it portrays work as the best antidote to being poor and removes protections that allow people to opt out of the labour market (Ridzi, 2009). Yet in practice, the workfare system is a highly contested and divisive market-centred system because it creates tension between paid and unpaid employees and encourages recipients to rely on welfare and poorly paid work. There is an issue here of dependence on the paternalistic state, and punishing the working class which are 'the expected 'beneficiaries' of the historic transition from welfare to punitive state' (Wacquant, 2009, p.33). The food poverty scholar Kayleigh Garthwaite (2017, p.10) considers that food banks, once 'viewed as a positive translation of the ideology of the 'Big Society', where volunteerism by active citizens made sense, are now deemed 'symptomatic of wider structural inequalities' and a symbol of the failure of the social security safety net. Encouraging citizens to take responsibility for poverty and other ills of society has led to the common assumption that charitable initiatives and their volunteers are responsible for the provision of core public services, such as emergency food assistance or help with applying for benefits, rather than the state (Garthwaite, 2017). For Garthwaite (2017) and other researchers (Dowler, 2014; Poppendieck, 1994; Riches, 1997), charity via food aid and especially food banks has depoliticised food insecurity and caused the neglect of investigations that pertain to the real reasons for food poverty in the Global North.

Additional critiques of AFNs concern the selection of goals within the larger project of food system transformation, 'leading to a complacency with, and cooptation by, the industrial food system' (Levkoe, 2011, p.689). Fairtrade, previously given as an example of a transformative activity that challenges existing international trade channels by establishing alternative ones, has been criticised for having lost its initial transformative mission and gradually resorting to conventional retail distribution circuits (Renard, 2003, cited in Goodman, 2003, p.4). The presence of a wide variety of fair trade as well as organic products in mainstream supermarkets shows that shortened and localized supply chains have been absorbed into mainstream and industrial practices in western countries. These well-received, proliferating

activities have become prominent social movements in the early twenty-first century in the global North (Morgan, 2009), however, for Levkoe (2011), ANFs are problematic for three reasons: firstly, they have contributed to the production of consumer subjects; secondly, they have neglected to consider the interconnected nature of problems within the food system; and thirdly, they have idealised the 'local' as having innately positive attributes. Such criticism indicates that despite being oppositional to mainstream food provisioning, AFNs may have backed 'unreflexive' actions that have resulted in the reproduction of existing structures of economic exploitation and political oppression. David Goodman and Melanie E. Dupuis (2005, p. 359) warn against the 'perfectionist utopian vision of the food system' as food production and its production are expected to abide by normative standards rather than generate democratic alternative political processes. Accordingly, for Goodman and DuPuis (2005, p. 360), localism might lead to previously mentioned 'unreflexive' politics, that is, actions that benefit the few and authoritarian elite, and in so doing, maintain traditional relations of power. Through the expression of reconnection, alternative food practices nonetheless hold radical and transformative power as they attempt to form closer relationships between producers and consumers (Kneafsey et al, 2008, p.31) and arguably across the various elements of the 'imperfect' food system. As noted by Moya Kneafsey and colleagues (2008, p.32), 'reconnection' may not be the driving force behind community activism given that those involved in alternative initiatives do not necessarily conceptualise their involvement as a means to reconnect with other humans or other non-human components of the food system. Rather, the concept and practice of 'reconnection' tend to be the perceptions of scholars and other intellectuals.

For all its shortcomings, food justice initiatives more recently operate within this 'imperfect' alternative food movement. These food-based initiatives refer to unconventional, sustainable food system activities that attempt to integrate the environmental, economic, and social health of their food systems in particular places (Feenstra, 2002); their number has considerably increased and mirrors the growth of emergency food provision since the retreat of the state across various levels of government (Garratt et al., 2016). Non-profit, charitable, cooperative, social enterprise and community-based groups now address unmet needs of the community (Cadieux et al., 2017, p.36) while addressing a wide range of environmental and social issues (Levkoe and Wakefield, 2014). A shift towards the local was particularly welcome in early understandings of AFNs because local food systems were expected to considerably

reduce greenhouse gas emissions and food miles, and strengthen local economies thus benefit farmers and consumers, urban and rural dwellers, the economy as well as the environment (Norberg-Hodge et al., 2002). While early AFN initiatives adopted a critical stance towards conventional agriculture, recent work has been framed as alternative rather than oppositional to existing agricultural practices (Allen et al., 2003, p.65). Just as a binary framework for local-global politics might be reductive, so would one for alternative-mainstream food systems (Kneafsey et al., 2008). Alternative food practices might be better described as initiatives that 'perform the economy otherwise' (Leyshon et al., 2003, p. 16, cited in Kneafsey et al., 2008, p.28) and as such, are not framed as endeavours that oppose existing structures within global capitalism but instead as spaces concerned with social, ecological and ethical interests. This point aside, the fact that similar terms preceded by the adjective 'alternative' are used in the literature in lieu of 'AFN' stresses the nonconformist or unconventional aspect of the movement, as shown by the following noun phrases used to designate AFNs endeavours: 'alternative food initiatives', 'alternative food projects', 'alternative food systems', 'alternative food movements', 'alternative agri-food networks', 'alternative food chains' and 'alternative food geography' (Trenouth et al., 2017, p.288). Terminology matters in food policy because the labels used for various types of food provisioning or consumption practices, whether 'fringe', 'oppositional', 'counter-cultural', 'interstitial', 'innovative' or 'alternate' inevitably affect the development of local food procurements (Trenouth et al. 2017, p. 287) as well as public perceptions. Irrespective of debates on terminology, alternative food initiatives can create spaces for experimentation and reconsideration of existing injustices within the food system. The next section discusses second generation AFNs and their quest for greater food security through activism governed by an ethic of care.

3.2 Second generation AFNs: Twilight Food Network and ethic of care

Second generation AFNs have emerged in response to wider systemic pressures, and to new challenges linked to discourses of austerity, insecurity and climate change (Kneafsey et al., 2021). These second generation AFN community schemes play an important role in the local urban foodscape. In this research project, food charities are part of a collective termed 'Twilight Food Networks' (TFNs) because they are made up of heterogenous, sometimes ephemeral underground alternative food providers that are only visible to volunteers or charity workers, or individuals who are food insecure. These initiatives provide transitory

moments of feeding and caring for those in need through the discursive construction of 'reconnection', as discussed in the previous section, and through 'an ethic of care', an idea developed within feminist scholarship and applied to social justice concerns (Cloke et al., 2016; Kneafsey et al., 2008; Lambie-Mumford, 2017).

An ethic of care is a lens though which Kneafsey et al. (2008) consider people's activities in relation to others' by highlighting the radical potential of emotions, and the symbolic power of food in the everyday. Kneafsey et al. (2008) define 'caring' as 'a species activity that includes everything that we do to maintain, continue, and repair our 'world' so that we can live in it as well as possible' (Fisher and Tronto, 1990, p. 4, cited in Kneafsey et al., 2008, p. 42). Further, drawing on the writing of Joan Tronto (2006), they identify the political potential of caring as 'a basis for rethinking the moral boundaries which preserve inequalities of power and privilege' (Kneafsey et al., 2008, p. 42). Similarly for the geographer Victoria Lawson, care ethics sheds a light on asymmetrical power in societies increasingly marked by market logics around efficiency and competition (2007, p. 8). Contrastingly, mutually benefiting relationships through the act of caring draw on affective relations, leading to 'different ways of theorizing politics' (Lawson, 2007, p. 3). Caring about others entails reaching out to form relationships and to engage in action to challenge injustices, hence the political potential to which Tronto (2006) and Lawson (2007) allude. 'Care' is not limited to the private realm, to homes and families, following neoliberal principles, but instead extends to a practice with a 'social ontology of connection' that highlights interdependence and relationships based on trust and mutuality (Lawson, 2007, p.3). A feminist ethic of care considers that all humans need and give care. It does not construct care as a necessity for specific groups of people only, for example the elderly or hospital patients who depend on designated caregivers or healthcare workers. Applied to food, the concept of care is practised though various aspects of the food system as well as at the consumption stage where food is prepared, occasionally served, and eventually ingested. A source of sustenance, a cultural marker, a catalyst for emotions, food is key to identity construction as individuals or within groups of various kinds; food is also a powerful symbol of love, affection and care (Kneafsey et al., 2008). In terms of addressing food insecurity, the concept of care is also utilised by proponents of the realisation to the right to food, drawing on Lawson's appeal to embodied caring practice, such as the act of giving emergency food (Lambie-Mumford, 2017).

The issue, however, with reconnection arising out of an ethic of care, is that the act of caring is more readily directed at humans for whom we have some form of contact, affinity and interest (Kneafsey et al., 2008). Lawson (2007, p. 6) conveys the same sentiment when she writes that the values inherent to care ethics, for example empathy, responsiveness, attentiveness and responsibility tend to appear in familiar places such as at home or within the same community. Care might only be achievable at the 'local' level and not with 'distant others', beyond the interpersonal. Consequently, the practice of care may exclude those deemed unworthy or undeserving, and manifest itself in arbitrary ways. Whether a person is perceived as worthy of receiving assistance has traditionally been key in determining a person's entitlement to aid, and if categories of 'underserving poors' have varied over the years, immoral behaviour has long underpinned the deserving/underserving dichotomy (Watkins-Hayes and Kovalsky, 2016, p.193). For instance, a person deemed deserving is legitimately unable to work through no fault of their own and conversely, the underserving individual is considered responsible for their predicament in view of what is perceived as personal misjudgements. Assistance might therefore be more readily given to individuals viewed favourably in terms of deservingness, and those who are closer to us. However, for Lawson (2017, p. 6), caring across a distance is more complex than a local/global distinction because it calls into question 'processes of exclusion of those close at hand, those within our cities, regions, and nation where people are treated as other, even though they are right by our sides'. By this, Lawson (2017) challenges assumptions of power and privilege, and moreover, she emphasises the importance of exploring how people are made to feel distant from each other, irrespective of any actual physical proximity.

3.3 Community kitchens as second generation AFNs and spaces of care within TFNs

In the context of caring through food, Paul Cloke and colleagues (2016, p. 2) offer a novel take on food banking by conceptualising them as 'spaces of care' that respond to 'a newly emerging and not yet fully formed ethical and political response to welfare 'in the meantime''. Their analysis concerns emergency food providers in the form of food banks but it can also apply to second generation AFNs such as community kitchens given that they too respond to an immediate need for food. While first generation AFNs have the potential to build social interaction between producers and consumers (Maye, 2013), the emergence of second generation AFNs such as community kitchens points to the potential of collective projects operating at community-based level (Goodman et al., 2012). In that respect, however,

Goodman et al. (2014, p.127) warn against the 2010-2015 UK Coalition government's 'advocacy of an altruistic, voluntary 'Big Society' to mask its ideological attacks on the welfare state'. It follows that second generation community-scale food structures such as community kitchens run the risk of becoming poor substitutes to collective welfare provision, and of further contributing to existing injustices within agri-food systems.

Cloke et al. (2006) recognise that food aid via food banks is not an adequate solution to food insecurity, however, they introduce the valuable concept of food banks 'in the meantime'. This concept articulates the idea food providers are spaces of care that offer progressive possibilities for those who rely on food aid, as well as for the volunteers, donors and other workers involved in charitable initiatives. The caring work at food banks is not merely 'sticking plaster', 'short-term pragmatism' that 'at best constitutes temporary relief, and at worst acts against radical structural change'. Alternately for Cloke et al. (2016, p.7), food banks are space where

> [p]articipation in care-giving and welfare-provision provides people with situated encouragement to talk about their personal experiences of volunteering and serving in ways that develop wider ethical understanding and political awareness.

The above quote paradoxically situates food initiatives such as community kitchens as caring practices that may enable meaningful encounters between people from various backgrounds. Consequently, 'in the meantime' community initiatives prompt political and ethical questioning among volunteers who 'are doing the caring' about 'what constitutes the common good, and how it might be cared for' (Cloke et al., 2016, p.6). Caring for others entails displaying nonmarket qualities such as solidarity, civic virtue and generosity and other attributes that have been rendered obsolete by neoliberalism (Sandel, 2012, p. 130, cited in Cloke et al., 2018, p. 6). In that respect, Kneafsey et al. (2008, p. 49) understand the ethic of care 'as a consideration of, and preparedness to take action about the needs of others' which might lead to more equitable, sustainable and closely connected relationships between stakeholders in the food system, including consumers and eaters more broadly.

This thesis builds on the notion of alternative possibilities when considering food aid through community kitchens, as contended by Cloke et al. (2016) for food banks. Community kitchens are initiatives marked by practical and emotional work that respond to the needs of people in crisis and where care for as well as responsibility to recipients of food assistance is

conceptualised as a part of broader constructs of solidarity. Kneafsey et al. (2008) emphasise the promising aspect of participation in alternative projects—such as second generation AFNs like community kitchens—underpinned by practices of care that, for some, reflect exemplary conceptions of community, education and way of life. Cheryl McEwan and Michael Goodman (2010, p.109) conclude their guest editorial to a collection of papers on 'Care-full Geographies' by stressing on the complexities inherent to the 'multiple practices and expressions of care' as these connect diverse communities. For the authors, care is best perceived as an ethos, that is, a prevailing tendency rather than 'a universal ethic' or in other words, a set of moral principles to which all should abide. Empirical chapters in this dissertation aim to build on the auspicious premise that consists of 'enacting more *carefull* spaces, places and worlds' (McEwan and Goodman, 2010, p.109) in the context of feeding the poorest and most vulnerable amongst us in the UK through community kitchens.

Overall, within wider AFNs, second generation alternative food schemes such as community kitchens are not likely to fundamentally alter structural inequalities and unjust food systems, but as stated by Kneafsey et al. (2008, p. 177), they 'might help to build the knowledge, and positive relationships that create the capacity for change'. Further to Cloke et al.'s (2016) exploration of food banks as spaces of care 'in the meantime', community food initiatives might follow this understanding by encouraging participation in endeavours that have the potential to create meaningful encounters between individuals of various backgrounds, and in so doing combat the unhelpful analytical binary of incorporation or resistance via food charities in an increasing austere landscape marked by rising levels of food insecurity, shrinking welfare support and increase in living costs worldwide. Citing the geographer Robert Morrill (1984), Lawson offers a hopeful message by praising dialogue and alliances around concepts of care and responsibility so that 'we may raise human well-being and fulfilment', and improve society (1984, p. 7, cited in Lawson, 2017, p. 10). Lawson's suggestion to question injustice, power and inequality within the discipline of geography can be extended to food justice activism where alliances around an ethic of care and responsibility hold transformative potential for all involved in feeding the most marginal in the UK.

4. Summary of the chapter

In summary, this chapter is a review of the literature that forms the basis of this thesis. Material discussed mostly covered western English-speaking countries, such as Canada, the USA and the UK, with however, in some instances, an emphasis on the UK.

The first section defined the key terms of food security as well as food poverty and discussed the scale of food insecurity in the world, and more specifically in the global north and the UK. Causes of food insecurity were then detailed, namely, general poverty aggravated by fiscal policy following austerity measures in the 2010s and welfare reform that culminated in the implementation of the Universal Credit system following the Welfare Reform Act 2012, in lieu of the former social security payments. This part discussed UK policy and measurements of poverty.

The second section explored food aid as a means for greater justice for individuals affected by food insecurity, and therefore, as a way to confront hunger in richer countries. Emergency food systems as charitable endeavours were defined, and a tentative scale of emergency food providers was given. Within the emergency food system, community kitchens were described along with a brief history of their existence and a short review of existing literature on the act of collectively providing food to those who need it in dire times. A critique of emergency food systems followed, along with a discussion of the food justice movement in wealthy countries.

The third section builds on the first two by situating emergency food systems within second generation AFNs. Specifically, emergency food providers are thought of as initiatives affiliated with what I coined 'Twilight Food Networks', that is, informal groups or charities that provide virtually free food to the community outside of the food banking system. TFNs are identified as spaces of care that provide necessities and offer progressive possibilities for those who rely on food aid, as well as for those involved in charitable initiatives. Moving on in this dissertation, Chapters Three further describes community empowerment within the TFNs, through the activities of charitable initiatives that operate as spaces of care and facilitators of greater food justice. Chapter Four explores in greater depth these spaces of care and food charities' use of digital platforms to run their service, engage with stakeholders and establish themselves as 'real' entities in the ephemeral space of the TFNs. Chapter Five explores my role as a scholar-activist working with and for non-academic communities in the food justice movement.

Chapter Three. Delivering food aid in a world of plenty through emerging Twilight Food Networks

> Hunger cannot be ignored. Hunger signals you to take what you need. Hunger makes you reach out your hand. Your brain, your stomach, your cells hunger. They break down matter and transform it into something else, the gestalt of your life. You cannot live without hunger. You cannot live with hunger. Hunger begins your exchange with the world (Sharman, 2006, p.230).

1. Introduction

A problematic interplay of social, cultural, economic and environmental factors prevent people from being 'food secure', that is, from accessing nutritious food according to their preferences (Ingram, 2011). Solutions to food poverty or insecurity are wide-ranging, and with a long, complex and contentious history (United Nations, 2022) because food is a complex issue that sits across a number of policy areas, including those related to health, education and the economy. In the UK, the responsibility for food security is not officially handled by any department. Yet, the 2019 addition of questions that pertain to respondents' food access to the UK's Department of Work and Pension annual Family Resources Survey (DWP, 2022; Food Foundation, 2019; Loopstra, 2019) suggests that the role of income and the lack of other resources in driving food insecurity is increasingly being officially measured if not more fully considered.

Despite this, in recent years in the UK—in pre-COVID times and as the pandemic unfolded and continues to unfold—what I am calling Twilight Food Networks (TFNs) have emerged and grown to provide freely available cooked and fresh food, and other household items, to marginalised groups of people. While institutions and networks like these have been a long-standing staple of the food poverty landscape in the US (Fisher, 2017; Pine, 2017; Poppendieck, 1999), the UK's more recent TFNs refer to a formal and informal grouping of community-based, antihunger charitable organisations that have been set up to collect, prepare and serve food to the most 'vulnerable' members of the community. Various types of food providers comprise the TFNs, sometimes labelling themselves, according to their own preferences, as 'community kitchens', 'soup runs' or 'community cafés' and include secular charities and community groups, to more traditional religiously affiliated organisations. This growing

network, albeit locally peripatetic in form, shape and existence, provides food to those who cannot afford it for numerous reasons, including lack of income, irregular employment or reliance on social security payments that barely or do not cover living costs. Users are often classed as the 'working poor' in that they are in employment, both irregular or full-time, but they cannot afford enough food for themselves, or their families based on low wages and irregular work hours. Other users can be those without homes, those with mental health and/or addiction conditions—being treated or not—and those unable to or out of work.

In this chapter, and throughout this thesis, I use the descriptive conceptual device of 'twilight' to describe the spatial, temporal, material—and sometimes human—liminality, 'fuzziness' and ephemerality of the people who populate and frequent these food networks and the ways and means by which many of these organisations operate, stay in 'business' and, to some extent, even exist. Spatially and temporally, many in the TFNs operate 'mobile' services, for example, operating out of different local government approved (or non-approved) buildings, street corners or locations over time, over the week or even over the day. While more and more of the organisations and locations of those in the TFN are becoming 'fixed' on both rural and urban foodscape in particular during and post-COVID, while others move quite rapidly or over short to medium periods of time due, for example, to complaints by nearby residents or businesses tenets. Others are moved around by local government as more suitable locations become available and/or close due to the sometimes volatile and contested existence and placement of TFNs. Thus, the absolute and relative presence of TFN interventions are, more often than not, 'twilight-like' in the liminal spaces, places and times they are located and able to operate both day to day and over time.

Materially, the 'twilight-ness' of these emergency food networks refers to the precarity, instability and ephemerality of the ability of these organisations to operate. Most, if not all, depend on the sporadic and unstable food donations—and these donations' uncertain form and quality—from supermarkets and other food corporations of 'surplus' food (and other goods), the 'good will' of local government to support them financially and/or with space and the monetary and other sorts of donations of community members and local and national businesses. For example, some days there are enough surplus foods to create a 'complete' hot meal, while other days this must be supplemented by purchased supermarket foods only available through council support or monetary donations. Critical to the operation of TFNs is

the time and labour of volunteers, the existence and permanence of which is unpredictable, who support the leaders and/or organising committees who start and run TFN organisations. Moreover, the emotional and material difficulties of starting, leading and continuing TFNs means that many organisation leaders either 'burn out'—often the endless search for food, monetary and voluntary labour—and leave or come in and out of the organisation, thus destabilising the solidity of these organisations. In these ways, the oscillating fortunes and states of TFN organisations—and those who populate them—are most often in what might be called an, inconsistent, 'twilight' state of existence i.e. operating at times in the light-filled, healthy state of day to day and longer term donations with a full complement of volunteers, to a much 'darker', 'indistinct' and 'fuzzier' set of conditions whereby monetary and food donations are not forthcoming, the volunteer pool is empty or non-existent and the organisation is verging on complete 'blackness' by having to close its doors.

A great many of those who frequent parts of the TFNs—what we are calling 'kitchen users' and/or 'service users' in this chapter[6]—operate in what might be considered as twilight-like states of 'in-betweeness', liminality and precarity in the context of the socially constructed notions of 'normal' states of being in the UK. In short, service users constitute a heterogenous group of individuals who experience a wide range of food—and often many other—insecurities due to either structural conditions or personal circumstances and/or choice or a combination of both structural and personal conditions. They sometimes live in homeless shelters, or temporary accommodation or are even completely 'off the grid', that is, part of the 'hidden' homeless population that most local authorities cannot or choose not to quantify. Many of these 'invisible' home insecure may sub-let, squat, sofa surf or stay with friends or family for financial reasons. In addition, while TFN organisations aim to communicate about their existence, activities and other critical information such as location, operating hours and food served, many service users experience the hazy uncertainty that often characterises the existence and day to day operations of TFN organisation. For example, while users can have access to hot meals and other fresh/canned surplus food, given their nebulous, indistinct and fuzzy—i.e., twilight—social and economic agency, they are at the mercy of TFN organisations' uncertain and inconsistent access to these surplus foods and

[6] Recipients of the food at TFN services are also often called 'guests' or 'friends' by some charities, especially by faith-based organisations. In this thesis, they are referred to as 'kitchen users' or 'service users' because these are the preferred terms employed by the majority of TFN initiatives, typically to the exclusion of FBOs.

goods and, importantly, what types of foods they prepare or provide on an everyday basis. Even though this food is 'free', users can have allergies or food preferences—with every human having a right to only eat what they enjoy or like—and so they often must 'accept' this inconsistent and ambiguous nature of TFNs in exchange for nourishment and other necessities in these twilight spaces.

At a broad scale throughout the UK, TFNs have begun to operate as a vital alternative or occasional 'life-line' supplement for growing groups of people in these twilight spaces. This is because the more institutionalised system of food banking in the UK requires formalised referrals from accredited professional (e.g. local employment centres, general practitioner or probation officer) and community members (e.g. clergy or commissioned service providers) and only provides a limited amount of food per referral before another one is required.[7] Unlike food banks, initiatives within the TFN work to feed anyone in need and emphasise on-site food consumption, conviviality and sociality. Much of this continued into the COVID-19 lockdowns with TFN organisations providing food access and support through fresh and cooked food parcel distribution to individuals and families who, more than ever, began to 'fall through the cracks'. Thus, because of TFNs' more informal safety-net logic, these organisations serve and cater for a 'no questions asked' wide group of individuals and families who may not meet the criteria for food bank referrals, e.g. the homeless, or those who need to supplement parcels from food banks and who are often referred to TFN locations from local food banks, or find them through other informal social networks.

The question that arises then, is how, in more detail, do these initiatives cater for the needs of the disadvantaged, the economically marginalised and those 'in-between' the formalised spaces of society? This current and still unfolding 'cost of living crisis' is defined by the rapidly increasing costs of food, housing and heating which is becoming not just prohibitive, but crushing for many living 'on the edge' in the UK (Hourston, 2022). The broader purpose of this chapter, thus, is to use food as a lens to analyse poverty and wider structural inequalities

[7] Kayleigh Garthwaite details steps involved in the operations of a Trussell Trust foodbank in her 2016 book *Hunger Pains*. Vouchers for three days' emergency food parcels are issued to people following an assessment by frontline professionals; this can be repeated up to three times but typically left at the discretion of the foodbank manager. Independent food banks operate differently in that they may require a bank statement or household bill as evidence of hardship (Garthwaite, 2016, p. 44) or in some instances, no proof at all. Initiatives within the TFNs operate in ways that Garthwaite (ibid.) might label as 'ethical' given that they require no 'judgments as to whether someone should be given emergency food assistance'.

surrounding daily life in the contemporary UK—and especially the experiences of those in the TFN—because lack of food is one of the visible aspects of poverty, along with other markers such as poor health and 'rough' sleeping. As part of an increasingly dynamic and emerging emergency food system that operates in parallel to food banks—and relatively unforeseen in the contemporary UK on this massive scale outside of war time[8]—we wish to describe, understand and interrogate how community food kitchens, as a core part of the TFN, strive to provide a critically important, yet (at this point, supposedly) temporary solution to those who are food insecure by serving surplus, nutritious food on a relatively reliable yet twilight-like basis.

I wish to take this analysis one step further however: my description and investigation of this hazy but growing foodscape in the UK builds specifically on recent research and commentary—and politicised positions—of several key agro-food scholars. The first is that of Charles Levkoe (2011, p.689) who asks how these sorts of initiatives like TFNs might contribute to transformative food politics by offering spaces and strategies 'that move beyond making slight changes to the current food system towards a reconceptualization of both the root of current dilemmas and of the solutions that will address them' (Levkoe, 2011). The second follows from Adam Pine's (2017, p.27) research in the US, whereby he argues that the crucial element for these and similar initiatives' successes lies in how aid is structured 'in a way that meets immediate needs and empowers individuals against [an] all-consuming [and entrenched neoliberal capitalist food] system that opposes transformation'. Thus, building on Levkoe and Pine, I suggest —and not without controversy in more structuralist academic and food policy campaign circles such as Riches (2011, p.768) for whom 'charitable food banking is very much a part of the problem of hunger in rich societies' and the fifty eight signatories of a letter to *The Guardian* where charitable food aid is compared to 'sticking plaster' (De Schutter et al., 2019) —that, similar to Cloke and colleagues' (2016, p. 2) claims about food banks, the organisations that make up the TFN provide crucial 'spaces of care' that respond to 'a newly emerging and not yet fully formed ethical and political response to welfare "in the meantime"'. In this way, I suggest that community kitchens propose a notion and materiality of caring that goes beyond the private realm to extend to the wider community through the

[8] The UK has a long history of soup kitchens. A prominent feature in Georgian and Victorian times, soup kitchens were revived in times of unrest during the two major wars of the twentieth century. Section 2.1.2.1 of the literature review provides a brief history of communal dining as a solution to food poverty among the most vulnerable and economically marginalised.

practice of a 'social ontology of connection' that highlights interdependence and relationships based on trust and mutuality (Lawson, 2007, p.3) across all sectors of society. Thus, while perhaps not providing the long-term structural solutions—nor specifically politicised responses—to food and material poverty in the UK, the TFN opens up and facilitates critical, community-focused 'care-full' food spaces (Goodman et al., 2010; Miele and Evans, 2010; Sharp, 2016) that work against the immediate conditions of food insecurity, poverty and nutritional concerns at the scale of one full belly at a time.

The chapter continues as follows. First, it situates the current contribution within academic debates from the UK and elsewhere on emergency food aid, community kitchens and food justice as well as those that position TFNs within the so-called 'second generation' of AFNs and that analyse the growth in organisations re-purposing excess food to feed those in food poverty in the UK. Second, the research design and methodology are explained in detail as is the case study location of the town of Reading, its social and economic conditions in relation to food poverty and short history and characteristics of growing response by the TFN-affiliated organisations within the town. The chapter then turns to a description and analysis the spaces of care provided by TFNs within Reading, focusing in particular on the twilight nature of the TFN in the pathways and problematics of their access to 'surplus' foods, the tenuousness but also adaptability of those in the TFN, and the ways that TFNs work to provide 'care' beyond just food and their immediate response of service users living in food poverty. Finally, the chapter concludes with a summary of the arguments and contribution of the chapter.

2. Situating Twilight Food Networks

2.1 Emergency food aid, community kitchens and food justice

For Lambie-Mumford et al. (2104, p. 15), emergency food aid is

> an umbrella term encompassing a range of large-scale and small local activities aiming to help people meet food needs, often on a short-term basis during crisis or immediate difficulty; more broadly they contribute to relieving symptoms of household or individual-level food insecurity and poverty.

Further to this generic definition, food aid refers to both emergency and non-emergency food assistance (Power et al., 2017) and provided by either independent or networked structures

or organisations (Lambie-Mumford et al., 2014). Differences between emergency and non-emergency food assistance are not sharply defined. Emergency food aid typically consists of food banks, soup kitchens, soup runs or mobile handouts. Non-emergency is thought to be food provision comprising community cafes, surplus cafes, food co-operatives, community gardens or subsidised supermarkets (Kirkpatrick and Tarasuk, 2009, p.138). The latter do not specifically respond to an immediate need to alleviate hunger, unlike emergency food charities that typically provide food at no cost to individuals who have no to low or irregular sources of income. Food aid providers are defined as either more 'formal' because they only serve specifically referred clients as described above, or they are seen as more 'informal', and do not require referrals (Sosenko et al., 2013, p.6) and are open to anyone 'in need' as with the TFN discussed in this chapter.

The exact number of initiatives in the TFN in the UK is not known, but the Independent Food Aid Network (IFAN) listed 3,000 'independent frontline food aid providers' in addition to a total of 1,089 independent food banks in 2020 (IFAN, 2022). Independent food banks are those that are not attached to the Trussell Trust network with the term 'foodbank' referring strictly to Trussell Trust operations with require refers to access a mix of long shelf life, non-fresh food boxes and other important essentials such as toilet chapter, toothbrushes and other donated items like these (Garthwaite, 2016, p.163). Again, for this chapter, food banks are not considered a part of the TFN, independent or not as they do not provide fresh, cooked meals to people but mainly provide food that is to be prepared and eaten elsewhere. Overall, numerous food poverty initiatives are active members of the IFAN, set up in 2016, which comprises independent, grassroots food aid providers across the UK that have united to have a common voice against food poverty (IFAN, 2018).

For me, these TFN food initiatives follow a model of reducing food poverty and insecurity that ensures 'that the benefits and risks of where, what, and how food is grown and produced, transported and distributed, and accessed and eaten, are shared fairly' (Gottlieb and Joshi, 2013, p.6). Typically, this concept encourages charities to look for long term and systemic approaches to tackling the root causes of hunger, rather than deliver short-term food access (Moragues-Faus, 2017). Confronting injustice and inequality is at the core of much of the food poverty movement and this approach is encapsulated in the contemporary notion of 'food justice' (Slocum and Cadieux, 2015). Briefly, food justice is an extension of social justice and 'a

renewed way of envisaging food security through the prism of inequalities – be they social, racial or gender-based' (Hochedez and Le Gall, 2016, p.6). Some US-based scholars warn however that food justice 'has begun to be folded into the neoliberization process through state involvement and an underlying assumption that food injustice can be solved by private market forces with increasingly dominant arms' (Agyeman and Mcentee, 2014, p.211), however, counter to this criticism and drawing specifically on community-based ethnography conducted by Adam Pine (2017, p. 46), this chapter will argue that the food justice movement—of which the TFN can be seen to be a part—can create spaces that reduce food poverty and marginalisation without this overt co-optation which is a fundamental aspect of the food poverty movement in the US.

2.2 Second generation AFNs, the TFN and spaces of care

Emergency food initiatives such as the TFN are made up of organisations, local groups or charities that occupy the hidden spaces 'between' and outside the welfare state, civil society and public sector. Within academic debates—as argued by Kneafsey et al. (2021) and others—TFNs can be conceptualised as part of a set of wider Alternative Food Networks (AFNs), but, importantly, a crucial part of a *second generation* of AFNs that go beyond ethical consumerist and quality concerns as now an established part of the mainstream food system (Maye and Kirwan, 2010; Goodman et al, 2012) by confronting layers of injustices in the mainstream food system. So-called second generation AFNs have emerged in response to wider systemic pressures, and to new challenges linked to discourses of austerity, insecurity and climate change (Kneafsey et al., 2021). Although it is clear they often understand these structural causes of food poverty (Sosenko et al., 2013)—which in the UK includes many years of the government policies of austerity (Lambie-Mumford, 2017; Loopstra, 2018b; May, Williams, Cloke, and Liev Cherry, 2020), the pandemic that accentuated already existing food poverty (Beck and Gwilym, 2022; Loopstra, 2020; Power et al., 2020), and now the cost of living crisis (Hourston, 2022) —many organisations within the TFN as part of this second generation of AFNs, focus their attention on the immediate food and hunger needs of the poor and most marginal (Power et al., 2017). Thus, these second generation AFN TFN community schemes play an increasingly important role in the local urban foodscape by attempting to feed those experiencing food poverty and food insecurity, particularly now in the UK and as a longer standing part of the poverty foodscape in the US (Pine, 2017; Poppendieck, 1994; Riches, 1997).

As I argue here, these initiatives provide transitory moments of feeding and caring for those in need through the discursive construction of 'reconnection', and through an 'ethic of care' expressed within feminist scholarship and adapted to social justice concerns. An ethic of care is a lens though which Kneafsey et al. (2008) consider people's activities in relation to others' by highlighting the radical potential of emotions and the symbolic power of food in the everyday. Kneafsey et al. (2008) define 'caring' as 'a species activity that includes everything that we do to maintain, continue, and repair our 'world' so that we can live in it as well as possible' (Fisher and Tronto, 1990, p. 4, cited in Kneafsey et al., 2008, p. 42). Further, drawing on the writing of Joan Tronto (2006), they identify the political potential of caring as 'a basis for rethinking the moral boundaries which preserve inequalities of power and privilege' (Kneafsey et al., 2008, p. 42). Likewise for the geographer Victoria Lawson (2007, p. 8), care ethics sheds a light on asymmetrical power in societies increasingly marked by market logics around efficiency and competition. Contrastingly, mutually benefiting relationships through the act of caring draw on affective relations, leading to 'different ways of theorizing politics' (Lawson, 2007, p. 3). Caring about others entails reaching out to form relationships with Others and to engage in action to challenge injustices, hence the political potential to which Tronto (2006) and Lawson (2007) allude. Care is not limited to the private realm, i.e. to only homes and families following neoliberal principles, but instead extends to a practice with a 'social ontology of connection' that highlights interdependence and relationships based on trust and mutuality (Lawson, 2007, p.3). A feminist ethic of care considers that all humans need and give care.

Therefore, when applied to food, care is practised though various components of the food system as well as the realm of consumption whereby food is prepared, served and eventually ingested. A source of sustenance, cultural marker and catalyst for emotions, food is key to identity construction as individuals or within groups of various kinds, and food is a powerful symbol of love, affection and care (Kneafsey et al., 2008). In terms of addressing food insecurity, the concept of care is also utilised by proponents of the right to food, drawing on Lawson's appeal to embodied caring practice, such as the act of giving emergency food (Lambie-Mumford, 2017) that is embedded in the practices of those in the TFN.

Broadly then, while it is not necessarily expected that TFNs as part of this second generation of AFNs can or work to alter the structural inequalities embedded in unjust food systems and

government poverty policies, as argued by Kneafsey et al. (2008, p. 177), they 'might help to build the knowledge, and positive relationships that create the capacity for change'. As seen with Cloke et al.'s (2016) exploration of food banks as spaces of care 'in the meantime', food initiatives might follow this this approach by encouraging participation in endeavours that have the potential to create meaningful encounters between individuals of various economic, social and cultural backgrounds, thereby combating the unhelpful analytical binary of incorporation or resistance via food charities in an increasing austere landscape marked by food insecurity and shrinking welfare support in the UK.

2.3 Is it food waste, surplus or donations?

The production, donation and consumption of food 'surplus' has recently—and strongly (Caraher and Furey, 2017; Morrisons, 2020, p.24; The Grocer, 2016)—been tabled as one of the key solutions to food insecurity. Food surplus refers to excess food that is produced beyond our nutritional needs and food waste is a product of this food surplus (Papargyropoulou et al., 2014). While the links between food surplus, food security and food waste are complex, the fact that food is being wasted throughout food chains, especially at the retail and consumption end, in light of the deepening of food poverty and hunger in the Minority world throws this the social and ethical implications of these issues into sharp relief (Midgley, 2014).

While the donation of food surplus to charities such as those in the TFN is not compulsory and edible food waste is not illegal in the UK, supermarkets have developed established CSR campaigns that supply surplus food to many parts of TFNs and more formalised food bank system on a regular basis. Other redistributors, such as FareShare, a national network of 18 independent organisations, repurpose surplus food from the food industry to thousands of frontline charities and community groups thus creating 'almost a million meals for vulnerable people' every week across the UK (FareShare, 2022). While constructed as a 'win-win situation', such a purported solution to food poverty may in fact contribute to the normalisation of food surplus as the supply mechanism for TFNs, which solves neither the issues of the growing amounts of food surplus nor the increasing incidence of food poverty, as argued by the poverty researcher Pat Caplan (2020, p.22):

> Food poverty in the UK is a problem which urgently needs addressing, as does the waste of food at all stages of its production and distribution. But bringing these two issues together, as frequently proposed, does not really solve the fundamental and complex problems of either of them, nor does it contribute to social justice.

Indeed, Pine (2017, p. 15) sees surplus food as a 'spectacle of overproduction' given that vast amounts of fresh unsold or imperfect produce that, in the US in particular, are set aside for regular collections.

To address the issue of excess in the supply chain, research by Jane Midgley (2014, p. 1883) explored 'the competing qualities of the food in its transition to [the state of] surplus' and further down the line as 'food waste'. Throughout this transitional process, industry actors play a more important role than TFN organisations given that it is this marketised state of the product that determines its categorisation as sellable, surplus or waste. Importantly, a distinction can be made between donated food that is 'of market quality' and surplus that is 'deemed unfit for the retail market' (Tarasuk and Eakin, 2005, p.178). Here, surplus products may no longer achieve full market price for numerous reasons, for example, they may be considered overstock, due to damaged packaging or proximity to sell-by-date. For all that, once taken off the supermarket shelves, the product is not entirely detached from its commodification and marketisation because it is further subject to valuation by food poverty organisations as suitable for use, free supply or saleable at reduced prices. The framings and qualities of 'food surplus', then, are pivotal to its role in charitable organisations given that these concerns determine whether surplus will be recovered and utilised by the third sector, or failing that, become wasted food and end up at the landfill or compost heap. Either way, surplus food access and distribution is indispensable for food charities even though they may complement other, often smaller private donations from local community groups, businesses or members of the public.

If this donated food that would otherwise go to waste is considered indispensable resources for charities in the TFN, this favourable view of surplus usage is in sharp contrast with that of environmental community organisations such as Feedback or FoodCycle for whom food surplus should be minimised across the supply chain and not co-exist with food poverty (Feedback, 2016). Critical food studies scholars further argue that it is not right to use food surplus to feed the poor, and that redirecting surplus to the vulnerable is normalising excesses within food systems (Caraher and Furey, 2017). Others challenge the mainstream 'win-win' surplus food redistribution narrative by suggesting policy recommendations that address both food poverty and systematic food overproduction as two causes of household food insecurity and food waste respectively (Papargyropoulou et al., 2022) Yet, TFN charities seek

to address people's inability to acquire or consume an adequate or sufficient quantity of food in any way possible, and one way to do this is to collect and redistribute surplus food so it is made readily available to those who need it most. This is the case for the organisation 'Plan Zheroes' whose mission statement argues that 'one day no good food will go to waste and no one will have to live in food poverty' given that they 'inspire and help connect businesses with charities to give surplus food to people who need it' (Plan_Zheroes, 2018). Notwithstanding the usefulness of food surplus for charitable organisations, its use arguably leaves the structural causes of food insecurity unchanged. The institutionalisation of surplus food into the social service landscape contributes to a depoliticization of the issue of food poverty and renders both private and charitable organisations responsible for providing support to the vulnerable (Caraher and Furey, 2017). This charity and third sector institutional practice is particularly subject to criticism amongst scholars in North America where surplus food purchase and recovery have long been central to food assistance programmes (Midgley, 2014, p.1874). Nevertheless, other scholars note that hunger exists at the crossroad between the industrial food system, the political and economic disempowerment of those experiencing food insecurity and the charitable sector (Tarasuk and Eakin, 2005).

3. Accounting for the TFN: Research design, data collection and the Reading TFN context

3.1 Research project and methods

Data collection for this chapter was based on a three-step process over a three-year period (2017-2020) and focused on exploring and understanding the specific case study of organisations and charities in Reading as its own TFN as well as how these organisations are connected to the broader UK-wide TFN. Throughout the research process, I sought to uphold high standards of ethical behaviour,[9] making sure consent was given by all participants at every stage of the project. First, I collected and analysed secondary data produced at the network level by various food organisations UK-wide, including websites, newsletters and social media feeds. These data helped understand the nature of the TFN, refine the research approach and identify knowledge gaps. Second, I began ethnographic research through

[9] Ethical approval was granted in February 2017 by the Reading's School of Archaeology, Geography and Environmental Science Ethics Committee prior to the start of data collection.

participant observation by volunteering at local food initiatives where she focused on how they ran their food sessions and who attended. Over time, at the food charity known as Sadaka, one of the key community initiatives located in Reading, I became one of twelve members who helped run the operations of the charity, along with five trustees. My role at Sadaka consisted of recruiting and handling volunteers' information and managing their social media accounts. Third, I conducted formal and informal interviews with service leaders and volunteers with a view to expand, compare and further ground findings in the specific experiences of members of the Reading TFNs.

3.1.1 *Doing ethnography through participating in the TFNs*

Ethnographic research methods are commonly employed in food geography and poverty research, most notably through the use of methods such as participant observation and face-to-face interviews (Beck and Gwilym, 2022; Caplan, 2019; Cloke et al., 2016; Garthwaite, 2016; Lambie-Mumford, 2017; Pine, 2017). Researchers also frequently volunteer in order to develop a richer understanding of the workings of food initiatives—typically food banks—and of the complex dynamics of emergency food respondents and receivers (Caplan, 2019; Garthwaite, 2016; Lambie-Mumford, 2017). This project did not set out to expose the lived experiences of those experiencing food poverty as this has been aptly captured elsewhere in academic publications (Garthwaite, 2017; Dowler and Lambie-Mumford, 2014; De Souza, 2019) and reports by leading food alliances such as Sustain through their 'Food Power' project (Sustain, 2022a). Instead, this research was designed to understand and analyse the TFNs in order to identify its extent and how it operates as a relatively novel feature on the food poverty landscape of the UK and specifically the town of Reading as an important case study of the TFNs.

With my volunteer role at Sadaka and through participatory observation at several other Reading-based TFNs (e.g., New Beginnings, Piaroo's Wish and Nishkam Sikh Welfare and Awareness Team), I helped run daily meal sessions and became familiar with service users and volunteers at various Reading TFN charities. To help me map the TFNs of Reading, I began to list all local food handouts and community kitchens in the TFN in the town of Reading, with the assistance of kitchen users and service leaders. This mapping exercise produced the list of TFN organisations in Reading (Table 2 below); this list was then turned into a more 'digital

friendly' versions during the 2020 pandemic as seen on the next page in Figure 2 and then maintained post-COVID into 2022 as shown in Figure 3.

Table 2. Food handout list as of 23 November 2018 pre-covid.

Food Handouts in Reading 1/11/18 | If errors, contact **foodinreading@gmail.com**			
Day	**Venue**	**Address**	**Time**
Mon	CIRDIC	Berkeley Avenue	10am-3.30pm
	Providence Church	Oxford Road	8-9pm
Tue	CIRDIC	Berkeley Avenue	10am-3.30pm
	The Oasis Pub (Carey Baptist Church)	21 Baker St, RG1 7XT (tea and cakes, £1.50 fee)	1-4pm
	Faith Christian Group	St Mary's Church	8-9pm
Wed	CCA	Prospect St Caversham	12-2pm
	Piaroo's Wish	Fairview Community Centre, Great Knolly St	11am-2pm
	SWAT	Town Hall	7-8.30pm
	Faith Christian Group	St Mary's Church	8-9pm
Thur	Argyle Community Church	Bridge Hall Oxford Rd (tea and coffee)	10.30am-12.30pm
	Salvation Army Church	Oxford Road (to be confirmed, fee may apply)	Lunchtime
	Faith Christian Group	St Mary's Church	8-9pm
Fri	CIRDIC	Berkeley Avenue	10am-3.30pm
	The Oasis Pub (Carey Baptist Church)	21 Baker St, RG1 7XT (tea and sandwiches, small fee applies)	12-2pm
	Muslim Group	Market Place	7-7.30pm
	The Oasis Pub (Carey Baptist Church)	21 Baker St, RG1 7XT (tea and coffee, community space)	7-10pm
	Faith Christian Group	St Mary's Church	7.30-8.15pm
Sat	Sadaka	Fairview Community Centre Great Knollys St	11.30am-1.30pm
	Sikh Seva	Hosier St	5-6pm
	CIRDIC	Berkeley Avenue	6-7pm
Sun	CIRDIC	Berkeley Avenue	9-10am
	The Way Ministry	Queens Arms Great Knollys St	3-4.30pm
	Providence Church	Oxford Road	4-5pm
	Diane	Market Place (NOT on first Sunday of the month)	4.30-5pm
	Faith Christian Group	Market Place (NOT on first Sunday of the month)	5-6pm
	SWAT	Town Hall	6-7pm

Figure 2. Updated list of food handouts shared online during the COVID-19 pandemic (2020).

Figure 3. Updated list of food services post-COVID (2022).

Interestingly, these lists I developed with the help of Sadaka volunteers and other kitchen leaders proved useful for services users in their daily quest for fresh food access because the ephemeral—and thus twilight—nature of the food initiatives meant that venues and operating hours often changed. Existing lists were out of date and hardly ever updated, which led to confusion among service users, who would, for instance, rely on friends for information, or risk being disappointed should a venue be closed upon arrival. Another important point concerns initial reluctance from service providers to being included in the list but this changed as leaders recognised the value in being regularly apprised of updates on existing sessions. Up-to-date session information also benefited their service users, and furthermore, prevented the duplication of sessions on any given day. To help situate the TFNs in Reading and surroundings, the next part provides a brief history of the town, its levels of poverty and economic growth.

3.2 Deprivation and economic growth in Reading and surroundings

Reading is a large town located on the Thames and Kennet rivers in the county of Berkshire, in southern England. Data from 2019 estimates the population within the Reading borough boundary at 161,780 residents, while the greater urban area is home to a population of around 233,000 with an overall population increase projected at 3.2 % by 2043 (RBC, 2022b). The town of Reading is an attractive location for business development given that it features the fifth most qualified workforce, which explains why major businesses and organisations have offices in Reading, including Microsoft, PricewaterhouseCoopers, Thames Water, and the University of Reading, one of the top 1% universities in the world (RBC, 2022b). Reading's location makes it highly accessible, since it is close to two main airports, Heathrow and Gatwick, and has direct links to central London thanks to Great Western Railway high-speed trains launched in 2019 that considerably reduced travel time to nearby cities. In addition, London's newest railway, the Elizabeth Line with its phased opening due to be completed by May 2023, but with trains already running from Reading to Paddington since December 2019 under the banner of Transport for London (Crossrail, 2022), will further enhance fast connectivity with the capital and European countries via the Eurotunnel. Reading is said to be 'a magnet for investment' (ReadingUK, 2021) and a prosperous area but for all that, a 2014 article noted the 'mismatch between Reading's outstanding economic success and the ability of local people to benefit from it (Fort, 2014). Late in that year, Reading Borough Council's policy committee launched a 'Tackling Poverty in Reading' strategy, action plan and needs

analysis' that highlighted four areas of action: improvement of life chances, support for those who cannot work or are on low income, increase of employability and creation of sustainable communities (RBC, 2014). A subsequent report published in 2017 to review the Council's original Tackling Poverty Strategy and action plan noted improvement in some indicators but that overall, Reading featured important disparities between skills and earnings of the resident population with those of the workforce, suggesting on-going important inequalities (RBC, 2017) that are likely to have been made worse by the pandemic.

Disparities in the borough are visible to the public, most notably due to the frequent publication of articles in the local newspapers *Get Reading* and *The Reading Chronicle* regularly reporting on the growing numbers of people living in poverty. For example, in *Get Reading* Lind Fort (2014) emphasised inequalities in Reading by citing the Abbey ward as having the highest number of homes reporting deprivation, followed by Whitley, and by contrast, Mapledurham as the only Reading ward with no signs of extreme level of deprivation. While the proportion of children in households in poverty in Reading[10] mirrors that of the national average, which stands at one in five, Reading has nevertheless the highest proportion of free school meals eligibility in Berkshire (ibid.). A post-COVID article in *The Reading Chronicle* painted an even bleaker picture blaming the 'cost of living crisis' for reversing the recent fall in numbers of children living in poverty across the UK; in Reading, 15.5% of under 16s are estimated to live in poverty, an increase from 14.5% the previous year and the highest on record since 2014 according to Department for Work and Pensions data (Young, 2022). While this chapter does not refer to under 18s, estimates of children and young people living in poverty are a good indication of poverty levels in the borough because they are crucial metrics for local authorities who take child poverty very seriously.

In addition, several measures indicate inequalities within the borough, for instance, the 2015 Indices of Deprivation (IoD2015) published by the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government shows that Reading is amongst the 10% least deprived areas nationally (DCLG, 2015). Along with the 2011 Census,[11] it suggests that two areas in South Reading were among

[10] There are numerous poverty measures but a commonly used measure to define people in 'relative low income' concerns households where income falls below 60% of national median income, before or after housing costs (Francis-Devine, 2022). A detailed discussion on poverty measurements is found in the literature review, Chapter Two.

[11] Results from the most recent Census of Population and Housing in England and Wales that occurred on 21 March 2021 is scheduled for release between June and July 2022 (GovUK, 2022).

the 10% most deprived areas in Reading, and that both income and employment deprivation i.e., the proportion of the population experiencing deprivation linked to income, and the proportion involuntarily excluded from employment, respectively, were estimated at 22.5%. The updated English Indices of Deprivation 2015 released in 2019 (IoD2019) explores changes in relative deprivation across England with key findings pointing to 61% of local authorities containing at least one of the most deprived neighbourhoods or LSOAs[12] in England, but with Reading still excluded from the most deprived neighbourhoods, and interestingly, most deprived London boroughs such as Tower Hamlets, Westminster or Islington having experienced the largest percentage point decrease (DCLG, 2019). Still according to IoD2019, out of 317 local authorities Reading ranks at the 141st most deprived, which is comparable to the IoD2015 where Reading was ranked at the 142nd. Within the borough, five LSOAs are among the most deprived 10% nationally in 2019, in sharp contrast with only two in 2015. Reading Borough Council official publications note the rapid 'pace of change' in the town increasingly marked by 'a clear mismatch between outstanding economic success and the level of benefits to local people' where unevenly distributed economic growth clearly deepens the ever-growing cleavage between most affluent and most prosperous neighbourhoods in the Thames Valley (RBC, 2017, 2022b). Given Reading's geographical location and rapid transportation links to the capital and Oxford's major research centres, it is not surprising that the town of Reading is among the top ten least equal urban centres in the UK, all located in the Greater South, according to a 2016/7 Gini coefficient created by the Centre for Cities (CfC, 2018). Cambridge was found to be the least equal, followed by Oxford, London and Reading in a fourth place, which suggests that trends that apply to Cambridge and Oxford, for instance, such as house prices and housing affordability ratio are expected to apply to Reading as well in the years to come.

3.3 TFNs in Reading

Numerous food providers as part of the TFN offer daily meals to the community of Reading. There are differences in the type of food they provide, mode of delivery, target population and most importantly, in the ideologies and rationale animating their activities of feeding the hungry and marginalised. In the town of Reading, religious groups are by far the dominant

[12] 'Neighbourhoods' refer to Lower-layer Super Outputs Areas (LSOAs) which are small areas with an average of approximately 1,500 residents or 650 households, used and produced by the Office for National Statistics for the reporting of small area statistics (DCLG, 2019)

providers historically: the Sikhs (Nishkam Sikh Welfare and Awareness Team and Sikh Seva), Muslims (Sadaka) and Christians (Christian Community Action, Carey Church, Churches in Reading Drop-In Centre, Faith Christian Group, The Way Ministry and The Salvation Army). Table 3 lists the main organisations that were involved in this thesis. Food organisations that were not included in this table are those that were consulted but not central to the research project although the latter are quoted throughout the thesis. While religious affiliation might be desirable but not compulsory among volunteers of faith-based organisations (FBOs), the act of giving drives donations and charitable action amongst many charitable food providers. This study did not look at FBOs given that their role in UK charitable food provisioning has been documented elsewhere, such as by Beaumont and Cloke (2012) in their edited publication titled *Faith-based Organisations and Exclusion in European Cities*. The ephemeral nature of the activities of initiatives within the TFNs involves their often-shifting locations and timings of where, and when they provide cooked and non-perishable foods. Other aspects of their activities are especially marked by impermanence, such as opening times, organising committee, volunteers, sources of funding, type of food and necessities provided to service users. 'Too bad it's not like going to Tesco' as noted by a service user (Sadaka SU, 2019).

Table 3. Main organisations involved in the research

Name	Religious affiliation	Type of food	Frequency	Funding
New Beginnings	None	Sit-down meal cooked onsite, supermarket surplus & hot drinks	4 days per week	Public donations, advertising proceeds, corporate partners & agencies, trusts and foundations
Nishkam SWAT	Sikh	Pret a Manger foundation food donation, surplus, takeaway meals cooked at local Gurudwara & hot drinks	Twice weekly	Local Sikh community, corporate partners, food providers and catering businesses
Oxford Homeless Project	Islamic	Surplus, homemade takeaway food, sit-down meal & hot drinks	Once a fortnight	Local community, anonymous donations and corporate partners
Piaroo's Wish	None	Homemade takeaway food, surplus & long life shelf food & hot drinks	Once weekly	Local community including volunteers' donations
Sadaka	Formerly Islamic	Sit-down meal, supermarket surplus, homemade food by volunteers, purchased meals	Once weekly	Anonymous and public donations, corporate partners, food providers & agencies including

		cooked by catering businesses, hot drinks		grants from Reading Borough Council & the Big Lottery Fund, trust & foundations
The Way Ministry	Christian	Sit-down meal cooked onsite	Once weekly	Local community, Church, food providers and corporate partners

4. Exploring and analysing the Reading TFN: a community response

In Reading, terms that designate initiatives with the TFN are marked by semantic differences: a charity is assumed to be a registered entity, regulated by the Charity Commission, whereas other generic terms such as kitchen, initiative, handout or group designate any association set up to raise funds and help those in need, irrespective of legal status. Emergency food aid assistance comprises various types of providers, including food banks or pantries, which are not discussed in this study. Reading's TFNs includes groups that adopt the term 'kitchen' preceded by either the nouns 'community', or 'soup' applies to charities that serve food in premises. The same applies to providers that call themselves 'café', unlike 'soup runs', which tend to be initiatives that distribute food in the street. A key difference between providers concerns whether service users have the option of sitting down to eat their meal as this set-up offers a social space, in addition to cold or cooked food, and in some instances, fresh produce, long shelf-life products, toiletries, clothing or bedding. When the activities of community initiatives cover a broad range of services, including food distribution, the term 'project' is sometimes used, indicating that the focus is not on food, but on various social interventions aimed at improving the lives of service users, such as referral to addiction or financial services.

4.1 The TFN fuelled by surplus food: 'I can only eat so many bananas'

Food at initiatives comes from various sources, including donations by private individuals, volunteers, local initiatives, the catering industry, and food retailers. It is also common for charities to allocate a budget for additional purchases such as milk, coffee, or sugar. Registered charities may benefit from additional sources of funding thanks to their fundraising activities and ability to access funding limited to legal entities. The redistribution of 'surplus food' or 'food waste' from supermarkets, or the donation of perishable meals by food retailers to emergency food aid providers are important sources of food for numerous charities, and in some cases, their only source of food. Through partnerships with

redistribution partners such as 'FoodCloud' and 'FareShare', supermarkets' food donations to foodbanks and charities have become the 'new normal'. They are highly praised for reducing the amount of food that goes to landfill and for making 'a real difference' to communities (The Grocer, 2016). A Tesco branch in Reading, on Napier Street, for instance, donates on average 10 crates a day, six days a week, to various local registered charities (e.g., Sadaka, ReadiFood of Faith Christian Group or New Beginnings). Nationally, partnerships between major supermarkets and the Trussell Trust network as well other national charities such as FoodCycle ensure a continuous amount of food for the TFN. Besides major food retailers' donations, in-store customer donation points provide long shelf-life food for charities. Further support from supermarkets might come from their Community Champion's efforts, which might result in additional food and non-food donations and food poverty awareness. For instance, Sadaka has close links with community champions at local branches of the three major supermarkets of Tesco, Asda and Waitrose, which results in targeted donations such as duvets from excess stock, or a choice in the weekly grocery donation, such as fruits instead of onions, which required cooking facilities for service users.

All major supermarkets work with emergency food providers as part of corporate social responsibility efforts that are highly visible online, and in their brick-and-mortar stores. The Morrisons in Reading provides food to numerous charities as well as the local independent food bank Readifood, which is part of 'Faith Christian Group'. Via its Foundation, the retailer donates funds to registered charities, which amounted to 3m in 2020, and 30m across 2,500 charities since its launch (Morrisons, 2020). During the COVID-19 pandemic, the foundation allocated funds 'to support charities working with homeless people' that amounted to £500,000 distributed to 94 charities that provide 'shelter, hot meals and essential supplies to people experiencing homelessness' (Morrisons, 2020). On the supermarket's website, visitors read that it 'understand[s] how important the issue of unsold food is both environmentally and socially'; they donate surplus food because they 'know that this is something that really matters to [their] customers' (Morrisons, 2018). The supermarket claims that it minimises the amount of food waste by first discounting perishable food in-store, then donating it to local community groups and charities, before providing it so it can be used 'to produce energy rather than going to landfill'. Yet, as highlighted by Caraher and Furey (2017, p 18), 'while the redistribution of food waste to emergency food aid providers may provide immediate relief, there is no evidence to show that it adequately addresses food insecurity'. For Caraher and

Furey (2017), and similar to Poppendieck's (1999) view in her influential books *Sweet Charity*, this practice is credited with depoliticising hunger and food poverty and does not speak to the gap between income and food costs. Papargyropoulou et al. (2022, p.9) also argue against the accepted notion that food surplus redistribution is presented as a solution to household food insecurity and the wider 'food dystopia' that masks the deeper UK-wide social problems of inequality and poverty.

The key issue, however, is that charities are more and more seen as a substitution for social provision and welfare, and food surplus redistribution to charities is a viable and supportable solution to supermarkets food waste (Caraher and Furey, 2017). It is not helpful either that surplus food is seen as the epitome of the 'spectacle of overproduction' by anti-hunger organisations for which vast amounts of fresh unsold or imperfect produce is set aside for regular collections (Pine, 2017, p. 15). Surplus is a key component of the TFN given that surplus food, particularly from supermarkets, might be the only fresh produce to which service users have access. A privileged relationship with 'Community Champions' or other supermarkets' senior staff enables charities to offer a wide range of fruits and vegetables that require minimal preparation as well as nutritious food as opposed to heavily processed options such as unsold white bread and pastries. Food served at emergency food handouts tends to be rich in carbohydrates and include sandwiches, pasta or rice-based meals because these are affordable, filling and relatively easy to prepare. Service users welcome wholesome meals made with donated surplus and at times prefer them to carbohydrate-rich options such as often reoccurring rice-based meals. In time, service users make choices of what TFN organisations they frequent and foods they choose according to taste preference and health as shown by the following statement: "I won't bother with the white buns, I eat sandwiches all the time, it's not good for me, not good for the piping" (Sadaka SU, 2018). [13]

These donations provide convenient food to charities, but a major drawback is that they also require volunteers and resources to pick up and store products on specific days before produce is consumed or given out. For example, given that Sadaka serves its meals on a Saturday, the charity cannot accept donations of meat or fresh produce early in the week as it will need to be properly stored or refrigerated to ensure it is fit for human consumption.

[13] Direct speech is reported using double quotation marks and to anonymise participants' identities, the following format was applied throughout the thesis: Name of TFN, SU for Service User or KL for Kitchen Leader and year of data collection eg. Sadaka SU, 2019.

Lack of appropriate facilities means that it is volunteers with a food safety qualification who handle food storage in their personal fridge. Other charities such as New Beginnings opt to run a 'community fridge' in addition to their bi-weekly cooked meal session, but at different times, in order to ensure food is swiftly redistributed. In that respect, food donations including surplus are a source of free or affordable food for services, but they paradoxically necessitate additional resources from charities, which they may not have. Due to lack of resources including vehicles, premises or storage space, small charities must rely on volunteers and the use of their homes to receive and store donations.

In addition, while charity leaders may specify the type of food they prefer, they may not have much control over what they are given: it could be mostly ripe bananas that "will bring fruit flies to our tents" as observed by a service user at the Nishkam SWAT handout, or hundreds of bread loaves with a best-before-date on the handout day, or vegetables that users will not be able to prepare for lack of cooking facilities, such as onions, parsnips and potatoes. Ideally, community kitchens aim to use some of the surplus food as cooking ingredients, but this is not always possible because quantities might be insufficient for a full meal, produce might be spoilt, or collected too late for it to be cooked and served on the handout day. For example, prior to the pandemic, the charity Sadaka used to collect surplus from supermarkets on the day of the session, i.e., Saturday morning, relying on donated produce to make a fruit salad. Following a couple of sessions with insufficient ingredients for a salad, leaders decided to assign the task of preparing a fruit salad to a volunteer to avoid worrying over the uncertain content of the surplus crates.

As for surplus or unsold food from the catering industry, this too requires storage facilities and volunteers for collection. For instance, the Pret Foundation, previously known as the 'Pret Foundation Trust' (Pret a Manger, 2018) was set up by the Pret a Manger leaders in 1995 to support local grassroots by making funding and unsold food available to grassroots. To be eligible, documents detailing the requirements by the former Trust, which still stand today even though the information is no longer available on the new Foundation website, charities must demonstrate that they are solving a 'real problem in a practical way', that they are 'set to support homelessness in some way', and to serve food to their users, they must 'be equipped to safely receive, store, prepare and serve food' (SAM, 2018). In Reading, the Pret Foundation works with at least two charities, including the Faith Christian Group's ReadiStreet

project by St Mary's Butt, and the Sikh group 'Nishkam SWAT' who run a mobile service by the Town Hall.

Charities rely on volunteers' availability to collect from Pret shops at the end of operating hours but with Pret's already-made food, storage space is not an issue since what is left is either shared among the users or disposed of because of the nature of fresh food which must be eaten on the day or refrigerated. It is not uncommon for service users to work as volunteers and in so doing, have priority access to donations during collection of surplus. Service users might only take a sandwich or forgo what they call the "sandwich only handout", because they prefer a sit-down meal to a cold sandwich eaten in the street. Another explanation to service users' reticence in eating donated food from Pret is that it occasionally evokes a personal aversion to unwanted sandwiches and salads by customers: "I am fed up with sandwiches people don't buy, can't even stand the sight of avocado" (Faith Christian Group SU, 2019). During these collections, I noted paradoxes with, for instance, appealing messages stating that Pret's food is 'freshly prepared with good, natural ingredients', a claim that lost its value once the food left the branch's pristine shelves to be distributed in the streets and occasionally discarded. Paying customers stood in sharp contrast with those who benefited from the company's charitable endeavours as some service users claimed they would never pay for this type of food, which seemed logical given their regular access to free and abundant quantities of Pret unsold meals to the point of dietary saturation. These observations relate to Midgley's (2014, p. 1876) point on the transformational states of food from marketised product to food surplus to food waste according to the involvement of different actors. The characteristics, values and qualities attached to the food—and in this case already-prepared food surplus from Pret—depend on where and when the food is eaten, and by whom.

4.2 Tenuousness and adaptability in Reading's TFN

> "We help our friends in need. But what happens when the session ends?"
> (Christian Community Action KL, 2019)

4.2.1 Fragile and Sometimes Fraught Relationships in TFNs

Relationships at food handouts are fragile. For volunteers, who are not themselves service users, it is desirable but often difficult to create bonds with service users whose lives are often

very different to theirs and marked by hardship. Limited time available during sessions further impedes interaction when volunteers are expected to serve the food, clean up and promptly clear the premises. In relation to this, Adam Pine (2017, p.52) observed in his ethnographic study that interactions between volunteers and participants were limited at times when little to no provision was made for discussions or sharing ideas.

Yet, constraints on time and interaction can be equally beneficial at sessions because some participants may not wish to interact with volunteers, who themselves may prefer to complete their assigned tasks and go home as promptly as possible. As I observed at Sadaka, there are volunteers who prefer to help behind the kitchen counter to minimise direct interactions with service users, whereas conversely, volunteers like myself prefer to be assigned a task such as 'hall management' where volunteers are expected to communicate with service users. In a similar way among service users, there are some who leave as soon as they have had their meals while others stay until the end of the service and even help with clearing the premise. Yet, even the friendships that are created amongst service users and volunteers can be fleeting because users gather out of their common need for food assistance and constitute an informal network among themselves to share knowledge about where to eat, sleep, get clothing and seek help.

Within the TFNs, service users, especially those who are permanently housed, provide invaluable help by volunteering at various organisations such as Sadaka, Faith Christian Group and New Beginnings. Given their own lived experience of insecurity, they can more authentically and 'safely' interact with people who have a similar past or set of experiences. Food banks and other similar programs have been criticised for creating a barrier between volunteers and participants (Pine, 2017, p. 150) and, therefore, a surprising and counter-intuitive source of 'anti-community'. This is very much in contrast to other kinds of community and civic programs of, for example, organisations in the TFN, where all involved tend to spend time together, especially in church-led organisations where faith encourages volunteers to engage with participants (Poppendieck, 1999). The issue with encouraging interaction, however, is that users are vulnerable individuals, some of whom may have mental health issues and be prone to violence or substance abuse, as exemplified by a volunteer who once remarked that "the vulnerable look after the vulnerable" (Sadaka, 2018). Accordingly,

professional boundaries[14] are crucial within the TFN spaces of care, similar to requirements for front-lined workers who are expected to be mindful of the power imbalance between themselves and those vulnerable in relation to them. Volunteers often say that "they get more in return than they give" (Sadaka, 2020) when helping at sessions but they must be reminded of the fragility of individuals who rely on food assistance and ensure the latter's best interests by observing compassionate yet firm boundaries.

4.2.2 Adaptability and instability of TFNs

Food insecurity is a complex, multifaceted global problem. In the Minority world, rough sleepers are visible signs of poverty that pedestrians can choose to ignore in the streets, but for all that, addressing poverty and hunger seems like an impossible task. Antihunger initiatives such as those located with the TFNs offer a space for individuals who wish to tackle food insecurity and shake cultural perspectives that articulate a definitive personal responsibility in one's own circumstances, discredit those who take advantage of social welfare and ignore the largely invisible growing issue of food insecurity in the Global North in places like Reading. In most instances, motivations for charitable action amongst volunteers relate to visible structural and food injustices such as the growing amount of food waste generated across the supply chain, or visible homelessness. The charity Sadaka, for instance, was set up as a food distribution service to rough sleepers by the main train station as stated by a former trustee who "had to do something, anything" (Sadaka, 2017). Another example concerns volunteers who work in food retail or the catering industry and help repurpose surplus food "because it's the right thing to do" (Piaroo's Wish volunteer, 2019). For service users, reliance on food charities is due to poor access to nutritious food due to geographical location or high cost and financial concerns. A lifeline to vulnerable individuals, food handouts provide meals as well as clothes, toiletries and other necessities according to demand. Their strength lies in their adaptability to their service users and the current situation because session leaders can easily choose to operate differently by changing where and when they run their service, and what they offer; in a way this constructively builds on the 'twilight' nature of the TFN by allowing an adaptability that better serves users. During the COVID-19

[14] Professional boundaries are guidelines that set the ethical and technical standards in the social care environment. Recommendations aim for social workers' safe, acceptable and effective conduct in their interactions with service users or clients (Cooper, 2012).

pandemic, for example, many informal charities easily switched to a pick-up service only (Sadaka and New Beginnings), whereas more established, formal charities not part of the TFN temporarily discontinued their service (Churches in Reading Drop-In Centre and Faith Christian Group) while they adjusted to official recommendations and related policy uncertainties.

With adaptability, however, comes instability in service delivery. The list of food handouts for the town of Reading is a testament to the variability in the provision of food by initiatives across the town. Regular updates ensure that these services by the TFN are accurately listed as these regularly change their operating hours, premises or they may temporarily interrupt their service. During the first COVID-19 lockdown in March 2020, the digital food handout list was viewed 1,500 times as soon as it was published on social media platforms, and many more times afterwards, which suggests an acute need for food support. Despite efforts from volunteers to regularly update lists of food handouts or promptly communicate changes in their services, food handouts are not necessarily reliable sources of sustenance as their location, occurrence or opening hours may nonetheless change without notice. Typically, kitchens start off as soup runs, distributing food in the street and then, in some instances, move on to premises; this was the case with Piaroo's Wish and Sadaka who initially distributed meals and other necessities in the town of Reading. Operating from a specific location and/or premises demands funds for rent and therefore requires that the initiative is either firmly established in the community to benefit from donations, or that it is a registered charity entitled to restricted grants. Some projects serve food in their place of worship but also in the streets as outreach projects; for example, the Sikh community runs the projects Nishkam SWAT and Sikh Seva which consist of food distributions in the streets of Reading on a weekly basis. The Christian charity 'Faith Christian Group' runs outreach programs throughout the year in the form of food handouts (ReadiStreet), night shelter (B4N) and food bank (ReadiFood). Other organisations such as Sadaka have been serving meals in the same part of the town since it was set up in 2016, but it has changed premises, occurrence and opening hours due to restrictions such as reduced income or changing government guidelines during the pandemic. Another organisation that used to hand out food at a particular premises was Piaroo's Wish, a local group who assisted Reading's homeless and vulnerable but who changed buildings numerous times in the years 2017 and 2018. In just one example, due to an

incident that involved a service user throwing a can of beer over the fence to the next-door school grounds, the council banned the charity from using its current location.

Measures taken during the COVID-19 pandemic meant that charities were no longer permitted to operate indoors, which considerably impacted TFN handouts in Reading. While some groups temporarily stopped running their services (Christian Community Action or Piaroo's Wish), others resorted to parcel distribution only services (Sadaka or New Beginnings) to follow government guidelines. Accordingly, charities were able to adapt to their varying circumstances prior to the pandemic, and more so when health and safety concerns forced leaders to consider safer ways to serve food when the first lockdown in February 2020. At a broader scale, mutual aid groups were set up by volunteers across England to address the needs of a growing number of individuals who faced hardship in the first months of the pandemic. Food charities as part of the TFN, however, along with local food banks continued to provide sustenance to the local population. Despite fears of COVID-19 transmission at handouts, few service users stopped attending and for the most part, initiatives continually reviewed the situation and acted in the best interests of its volunteers and service users to ensure safe and reliable sessions.

4.3 Spaces of care beyond food in the TFNs

> "Now that I share all I have, I never run out of anything" (New Beginnings SU, 2019).
>
> "This place saves lives" (Sadaka SU, 2018).

4.3.1 "I have food at home": TFNs as more-than-food providers

A recurrent concern in the literature pertains to whether food charities are a solution to food poverty, as in, whether they offer the insecure a long-term alternative to food purchased at supermarkets (Caplan, 2017; Dowler and Caraher, 2003; Lindberg et al., 2017). TFN limitations include poor long-term economic viability and their positioning as a 'temporary' aid to food poverty that too often becomes a long-term solution for many of society's most marginal and 'uncared for'. Importantly, initiatives within the TFN help mitigate the immediate lack of food but often do not work towards ending hunger given that they do not fundamentally alter people's situations with regards to food access, i.e. by creating structural and/or policy changes. This finding is a key concern for the Global Solidarity Alliance for Food, Health and

Social Justice, or 'GSA RightsNotCharity', a trans-Atlantic group of activists and academics founded in 2018 to respond to the rise of food banking and use of private philanthropy (GSAFHSJ, 2022). Similar to criticism formulated by Andy Fisher (2019), also a member of the Alliance, the issue lies with the institutionalisation of corporate-supplied food banking that originated in the US before spreading across Europe, which represent 'emergency solutions' to food poverty—many of which have become permanent on the foodscape—that not only hide the real causes of food insecurity but also can work to worsen poverty (Caplan, 2019; Caraher and Furey, 2017; Spring et al., 2022).

TFN initiatives discussed in this study are not food banks but some (Fisher, 2017; Goodwin, 2020) argue that they should be subject to similar criticism given their role as emergency food providers that cannot prevent hunger. However, and very importantly, TFN initiatives do provide a space for 'participative food justice' (Moragues-Faus, 2017), whereby these organisations provide fresh, cooked food to those who cannot purchase it. In addition, initiatives respond to the changing needs of users by offering services such as haircuts, clothing or toiletries. Professional advice may also be given in a wide range of topics that include housing, social services, drug and alcohol rehabilitation, legal aid, employment and health care. Grassroots, registered charities and commissioned services may work together to help vulnerable individuals as exemplified by the partnership between the Salvation Army and St Mungo's, where the former assists with housing, and the latter with street outreach (Fall 2018). Community kitchens liaise with housing charities, state-funded social service agencies (Shelter, St Mungo's, Crisis or Launchpad) and the local police to address homelessness and promote rehabilitation. Food distribution organisations have a privileged relationship with local government and partners which ensures attendance to meetings, training sessions and access to grants. Council members recognise that charities have limited funding for their operations but that they connect with the vulnerable population more efficiently and regularly than commissioned support services. Service users tend to distrust authorities, finding them "useless" because "whenever they give, they expect something in return" and that they mainly help those with drugs and alcohol problems, which in their view suggests that commissioned services prioritise the most marginalised (Christian Faith Group SU, 2018).

Another issue with respect to formalised council support is that users must demonstrate 'local connection'[15] to qualify for assistance from commissioned services, such as housing support from the Salvation Army who 'operate on a referral basis to that [they] support the people who need it most'. Failing that, individuals must rely exclusively on free food services and other charitable initiatives to meet their basic needs. For example, it is not uncommon for service users to be squatters or to live in tents because they are not entitled to help from the council; in addition, service users with access to welfare support told me they resort to kitchens when they run out of money. Among those entitled to supported housing,[16] where supervision and care are provided alongside accommodation, including main meals, it is common for individuals to nevertheless visit community kitchens to socialise with other service users, who themselves may also "have food at home" (New Beginnings SU, 2020) and mainly visit handouts for social purposes. Therefore, food offered at TFN kitchens serves as a gateway to additional support systems and social networks, and in that sense, food services are a safety net for those who are at risk of, or already experiencing a wide range of insecurities and forms of marginalisation.

4.3.2 Sharing and giving: "I share what I don't need. I am just me and too much fruit feeds fruit flies"

By attending sessions, participants have access to free food, necessities and sometimes support services as well as a welcoming space. Some initiatives such as Churches in Reading Drop-In Centre (CIRDIC) offer a space where the vulnerable can eat, shower, collect clean clothes and seek advice from representatives of commissioned services, such as the homeless outreach charity St Mungo's. Research findings by Pine (2017, p.49) suggest many that many do not find food handouts enjoyable places for collecting food and forming friendships. A gathering of vulnerable individuals whose predicaments might include substance abuse, rehabilitation, incarceration, homelessness and financial hardship can be conducive to conflicts. Incidents are common but can be mitigated as argued by a Salvation Army employee for whom "managing [homelessness] services equals managing risks". Yet, service users form

[15] A person has a 'local connection' with the district of a housing authority according to criteria such as whether they are or were normally resident of the area, are or were employed there or have family associations in the local authority (DLUHC, 2022).

[16] The supported housing providers comprise housing associations, local council housing, charities and voluntary organisations that deliver accommodation and support services to those deemed most vulnerable (DLUHC et al., 2020).

connections at sessions and tend to visit similar venues, preferring sit-down meals, for instance, to pick-up only, which was an important concern during pandemic lockdowns when all indoor services had to cease. This is because community initiatives enable service users to come together, sit among their friends, socialise with volunteers and more importantly, these constitute social events that direct the daily and weekly routines of marginalised people who are socially excluded because they have restricted access to work or to leisure activities. This was exemplified by numerous service users who affirmed that without community initiatives, they would not have access to balanced meals, and they would rarely leave their room. For example, a service user who lived alone affirmed that without the TFN he would never see anyone. He routinely attended kitchens where he met his friends, taking very little food away with him: "I share what I don't need. I am just me and too much fruit feeds fruit flies" (Faith Christian Group SU, 2020).

When it comes to organising a response to food poverty, food insecurity researchers encourage taking participants' voice into account rather than drawing solely on the views of charity leaders when designing interventions (Dutta et al., 2013; Pine, 2017, p.151). Some argue that researchers, volunteers and organisations are inherently biased when defining food insecurity (Bastian and Coveney, 2013) hence the prevalence of top-down solutions that fit their assumptions of what it means to be food insecure. While considering the lived experiences of the food insecure is important, it remains debatable whether those concerned have the agency or ability to act upon their predicament. Following research conducted by Pine (2017, p. 140), those experiencing food insecurity can be less likely to frequent the TFN because the spaces where they seek help are not necessarily designed with a view to empower participants. If some food providers offer advice and signposting, however, many organisations operate mainly as food outlets and lack time or resources to do more than serve food. This is another obstacle to the creation of TFN organisations as an oppositional space given that people's basic survival on limited income, as well as their reliance on charities or benefits, demand enormous amounts of time and effort. Participants mention that they would rather choose regular community kitchen lunches than accept zero-hour agency contracts, or extra shifts paid per hour. As stated by a service user pre-COVID (Sadaka SU, 2018):

> "they usually give me two shifts a week, sometimes three, which is just about enough to pay rent where I sublet. I don't have money to buy food when they give me fewer

> shifts, and they can tell you at the last minute that you are not needed for the day. So I prefer to say no when I know I can get a hot meal and some bread and fruit to take home, rather than risk working just enough before I get sent home to buy food that I am going to have to cook and store"

Due to the unreliable nature of warehouse or agency work, service users rely as much as possible on handouts and save their income for periods when, for example, supermarkets like Tesco only need their 'core workers' and not extra agency staff. Additionally, service users carefully consider handouts before agreeing to working a shift given that food and meals at specific sessions might be more valuable in their eyes than paid work. Here, it is clear that relying on charitable food organisations is comparable to full time work where there is a continual pressing need to ensure survival. This is identified by Pine (2017, p. 113) who notes that in such circumstances 'the struggle for survival takes precedence over effective mobilization to change their life conditions'. Uneven work, poor or lack of income are stressors for many, and while charities aim to help beyond food, the service users' constant worries over their daily necessities, including food, prevent them from addressing other concerns, as identified by a service user for whom "being poor is full time work" (Faith Christian Group SU, 2019). In that vein, volunteers at handouts aim to care beyond food by offering a reliable source of sustenance, a safe space for all to socialise and to share resources that are either donated or purchased.

5. Conclusions

In this chapter, I presented the notion of the TFNs, I then situated TFNs within the second generation of AFNs, and lastly, I grounded my discussion in the food justice, food poverty and care ethics literature. In the analysis, I explored TFNs in greater depth and emphasised their highly debated reliance on food surplus. Through the case study of the TFNs in the town of Reading, I discussed two characteristics of those TFNs, namely, its tenuousness and fragility, both of which allow services to respond in a timely manner to current and changing needs of vulnerable individuals. Finally, I explored how initiatives are spaces of care where service users share resources, form friendships, and receive support from volunteers and leaders. While initiatives within the TFNs alleviate immediate hunger, they nevertheless enable a status quo when it comes to tackling the structural cause of poverty, as in the case in economically unequal town of Reading. Similar to work conducted by Cloke et al. (2016) on food banks, the

TFN might be praised as an essential 'in the meantime' support system because the alternative would be to let vulnerable individuals manage their limited resources, occasionally rely on food banks to access food, or remain chronically hungry and malnourished, opting for low-cost unhealthy food for substance. There is evidently a complicated relationship between community-based initiatives and the neoliberal state, in the UK and elsewhere (Pine, 2017). Arguably, those in power have contributed to—or failed to confront—macro-level conditions that lead to insecurities and social inequalities for a very long time, charitable organisations within the TFNs fill the void between community, food systems and the state with a 'no questions asked' approach that works from an ethic of care to provide people fresh, cooked food and other resources in the here and now.

This chapter described the controversial relationship between charitable food provisioning and surplus food, a relationship that for all its faults prevents food from going to waste and facilitates access to food for most marginalised people at virtually no cost to charities and local authorities. The TFNs are made up of organisations that are fragile but that can rapidly adapt to current events, as exemplified during the pandemic when indoor sit-down meals were replaced by parcel services to minimise risks of spreading COVID-19. To that effect, this chapter sought to answer the third research question by showing that TFNs empower participants through the provision of food and a safe social space where service users can be signposted to local services, and 'cared' for. At times, however, TFN initiatives appear to operate in a vacuum, tending to participants' immediate needs, but they lack capacity to engage in activism that could remove the obstacles associated with living in poverty and food insecurity. Therefore, is charitable food assistance an acceptable solution to food poverty, albeit a temporary one? The answer depends on the answer to the following statement: if food handouts are expected to address the structural causes of poverty and alleviate food insecurity in the long-term, then they are clearly failing because the number of people who rely on free food services is on the increase. Worse, initiatives contribute to the continuation of an unequal and unsustainable food system by operating a parallel, 'twilight' food system that successfully feeds the most marginal. Indeed, it might be argued that the TFNs are made up of charities run by a fleeting collective of good-willed individuals that only momentarily help the vulnerable and encourage dependence on charitable endeavours for their everyday necessities. But if the network's goals consist of the temporary alleviation of immediate hunger, the provision of an informal support system, and a safe, caring space to counter social

isolation, then it is succeeding. TFNs help lessen the suffering that vulnerable individuals encounter when forced to subsist below the poverty line and the minimise the impact of food poverty on their health and overall quality of life. They provide a lifeline to the most marginalised and complement statutory services that local authorities struggle to deliver given cuts to their budgets. Charitable endeavours should not mask the fundamental injustices that are built into the structure and values of a society, but they should strive to—and as this chapter has shown, they do—bring them to the forefront to enact social change and, thus, enable transformative food politics that promote access to healthy food for all.

Chapter Four. Go virtual to get real?: Digital activism, community kitchens and food justice in Southern England.

1.Introduction

Social media is widely used by various types of organisations to communicate with audiences, stakeholders and the public. Sharing information through social media is not only effective and relatively affordable but also increasingly necessary in the digital age even though it might appear intimidating for some charities (Lawrance, 2013). Public relations research clearly points to the usefulness of a social media presence for organisations and businesses that aim to maintain a corporate presence (Briones et al., 2011). Media experts such as Charity Digital for instance encourage small and large charities to craft a social media strategy by scheduling posts, managing comments and measuring success in order to improve their fundraising outcomes and better connect with their audiences (CD, 2022). During the COVID-19 pandemic, social media became especially important for charities in view of social distancing rules. While major platforms (Instagram, Facebook, LinkedIn and Twitter) remained important tools for spreading awareness during the pandemic, new platforms (TikTok and Clubhouse) came to the forefront, and in so doing, provided an opportunity to reach potential donors and a new audience (Jones, 2022). Social media platforms constitute a cost-effective tool that facilitates information flows and discussions, encourages dialogue and mutual support; however, despite these benefits, not all community groups and voluntary third sector organisations have adopted or are able to embrace new media technology such as social media. Thus, this chapter focuses on community kitchens—as a core part of the Twilight Food Network (TFN) introduced in Chapter Three—that rely heavily on social media platforms to conduct their activities, communicate to a broad audience and facilitate a social presence across digital foodscapes and the 'real' world as well as those that only occasionally use those platforms.

Charity practices that make use of digital technologies in the form of mobile phone apps and internet-enabled devices in campaigns for social and political change are increasingly common. These practices, situated within the realm of 'digital activism' (Joyce, 2010), have become *indispensable* tools for many organisations in their attempts to communicate about their activities, secure funding and recruit volunteers. Indeed, initiatives with the TFNs as the

core focus of this thesis, have been found to rely heavily on information and communication technologies (ICTs) to operate through digital platforms such as social media, 'shop & raise' and crowdfunding websites to create new forms of food poverty activism through what Vegh (2003) calls 'internet-enhanced' action.

Given the above, this chapter is animated by the following questions:

1. How do TFNs use social media?
2. In what ways are social media important for the operation of the organisations in the TFN?
3. How does social media contribute, if it does, to the successful running of TFNs?
4. How might this engagement with social media promote food justice in TFNs?

The first part of this chapter positions it within the broader literature on social media and platforms, sociality, networked individualism and digital activism. This discussion is then narrowed to more specifically discuss emerging debates around digital food activism. The following section discusses the research design and methodology of data collection in the study of the online, digital food activism of TFNs located in Oxford and Reading. The next section of the chapter develops an analysis of this digital food activism of TFNs in the South of England by analysing the 'caring' communications of TFNs, the ways that digital food activism promote civic participation and food justice, and the crucial ways that being online for TFNs makes them 'real' to outside institutions such as local governments. The chapter concludes with a summary of the chapter's contributions and some thoughts on the digital food activism of TFNs.

2. Situating the Chapter within debates

2.1 Social media and scalable sociality

Social media refers to web-based participatory media as tools devised to facilitate emerging demand for social engagement. Platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and WhatsApp, among others, are networks that act as meeting points for social exchanges (Wheeler, 2017, p.21). These social media platforms and their use are constantly evolving along with the technology that enables their development and systems as well as hardware that allows their distribution. Media scholars David Miller et al. (2106) write of 'scalable sociality' to capture the way these platforms have varying amounts of privacy and the varying extent

of people's networked connections through them. Some of these platforms have scaled down from public broadcasting, others have scaled up from private communication while numerous platforms feature interactions that are situated along various degrees of scalability between the private and the public, e.g., private versus public Facebook groups. On one end of the scale, sites enable private dyadic conversations, such as Telegram or Meta's Messenger, with exchanges between two individuals or within a closed group, and, on the other end, public broadcasting with Facebook posts or Tweets, accessible to all registered users and audiences (unless accounts are private of course).

Miller et al. (2016, p.206) foresaw a growing scalable sociality across social media, most notably due to the falling cost of developing new platforms and the time needed for their adoption by a large group of people. New platforms can more easily capture 'any little niche that still waits to be exploited' and lead to the 'death of distance' (ibid). Furthermore, newer sites increasingly broaden participation, going from one-to-one exchanges to larger groups. An example pertains to the messenger platform of Telegram that gradually adapted to demand by not only allowing encrypted dyadic communication but by also proposing 'channels' for groups of people and additional features such as the possibility to leave comments or react to a message. In a similar fashion, the online video sharing application 'YouTube' is now marked by scalable sociality with its open comment section and 'live chat' during live broadcasts.

Defining social media is therefore a matter of perception according to discipline. For anthropologists the topic of sociality is at the core of its definition, whereas connectivity is typically favoured within communication studies (Miller et al., 2016). The present study adopts the lenses of both sociality and connectivity to grasp how community kitchens in the TFNs use and organise themselves via social media platforms when face-to-face interactions are neither possible nor necessary or when digital engagements enhance and support those in the in-person, face-to-face world. Another key aspect of Miller et al. (2016) relevant to this study is that there is no clear distinction between the virtual and the real. Both the online and the offline are 'real' insofar as they are integral parts of everyday life and where communication occurs. A WhatsApp chat group can be seen as just another place where conversations occur, where people interact, perhaps in the same way as they would in their workplace, home or community. Yet, popular perception points to the loss of essential elements that make up our

authentic humanity due to technology because face-to face communication is deemed far richer than digital communication.

Following Miller et al. (2016, p. 206), I disagree with this premise and instead suggest that digital platforms can offer opportunities for social connections that do not 'change our essential humanity'. Scalable sociality is one way by which social media magnifies our capacities to socialise and build our existing connections. This approach is shared by Wellman et al. (2006, p. 6) who see the internet 'as another means of communication to facilitate existing social relationships and follow patterns of civic engagement and socialization', which means that people very often add to, rather than subtract from their existing social contacts by communicating online. The global reach of the Internet enables additional means of communication that are integrated in the existing patterns of social life, and that do not necessarily result in severed local ties. People within organisations benefit from diverse linkages between multiple networks and hierarchies thanks to ICTs in the new information age. Two decades ago, Manuel Castells (2010, 2nd edition of *The Rise of the Network Society*) foresaw new social structures in the making as the 'network society', that is, a form of organisation in human experience marked by digital networking technologies that continually expand and overcome the traditional limitations of social organisation and practice.

2.2 Social media platforms

In the past, activists employed existing methods and 'technological devices' of the day - be it the printed press, radio or photography - to communicate about their campaigns and activities. Since the turn of the nineteenth century, with the discovery of electricity and thanks to countless scientific advances a century later, activists have had access to dictaphones, video cameras and cassette tape recorders. Today, technological shifts to 'the digital' suggest a low-cost scalability of the global digital network that encodes and instantaneously transmits information as 1s and 0s (Joyce, 2010).

Applications—or 'apps'—constitute an important part of digital activism, but they are only the most visible element of it. Social digital platforms, including messenger-type applications (Meta's Messenger or WhatsApp, Telegram and Signal) and networking websites and microblogs (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and LinkedIn) are only a fraction of the tools used by digital activists. Other online infrastructures include crowdfunding and 'shop & raise'

websites (JustGiving and Crowdfunder), team-work platforms (Trello board, Slack, Dropbox and Google docs) blogs or website builders (Tumblr, Wordpress, Wix and Square Space) and numerous other applications that support primary applications (Hootesuite, TweetDeck and Twittimer). As an online presence has become important if not necessary—and *required* as I show below—for most organisations, so has the numbers of digital tools that cater for various needs and digital competencies. Electronic and digital technologies are constantly evolving and opening up new spaces of collaboration, content creation and information management. While optimistic about the potential of digital practice, I nevertheless follow Mary Joyce (2010, p. viii) in the introduction to her edited anthology *Digital Activism Decoded* when she recommends 'viewing digital practice with a sceptical eye is warranted [as is an] openness about its shortcomings'.

2.3 Networked individualism

In this context, Wellman et al. (2006, p.11) argue that computer-mediated communication cultivates the development of 'networked individualism' in societies via the ubiquity of the internet since

> connections are to people and not to places, the technology affords shifting of work and community ties from linking people-in-places to linking people at any place. Computer-supported communication is everywhere, but it is situated nowhere.

This 'new social operating system', born out of what Wellman et al. (2016) refer to as the 'Triple Revolution' of social networks, the Internet and mobile connectedness, allows people to paradoxically take individual action within social networks. Networked individualism thus presents a shift from group-based societies to network-based societies, where individuals operate in their own personal communities and switch amongst various sub-networks set up according to shared interests.

TFN community kitchen volunteers offer an example here: they may be part of several online networks, including ones that perceive the vulnerable in an unfavourable light, such as neighbourhood groups for whom the homeless might cause nuisance. This relatively novel situation suggest neither loss nor gain in the complex aspects of community but rather a profound transformation in the *nature* of community, 'fitting into the growing realization that

the McLuhanesque 'global village'[17] complements traditional communities rather than replacing them' (Wellman et al., 2006, p.12).

Therefore, for Wellman et al. (2006), computer-mediated communication has not replaced local neighbourly get-togethers, but it is characterised by the interplay of the social and the technological (Madianou, 2014). This internet-mediated communication is neither normatively 'good' nor 'bad' (Miller et al., 2016) and moreover, it allows people to live differently and *collectively* through media (Couldry, 2012). People may act similarly on various online platforms by posting about their experiences or views, yet differences is created through the purpose of sharing these experiences or views. Given that everyday practices of work, identity and sociality are intertwined (Couldry, 2012, p.209), digital media offers a relatively new and novel 'alternative media infrastructure' for the creation of new forms of public media and politics (Gilbert, 2018 cited in Couldry, 2012, p. 129).

2.4 Digital activism

What might a democratised alternative media infrastructure look like? What is the potential of digital activism for social action, for example around food poverty and insecurity? Digital activism is a type of cyberactivism which designates cyberspace or web-based collective action aimed at political or social change; examples include 'electronic disturbance tactics and online civil disobedience, self-organization and autonomous creation of infrastructure, software and hardware hacking, and hacktivism' (Milan, 2012, p.1). Digital activism serves three main functions: awareness/advocacy, organisation/mobilisation and action/reaction (Vegh, 2003). Yet, at the same time, research conducted by Kevin Harris and Angus McCabe (2017a; 2017b) on social media use by community groups questions the contribution of digital media to campaigning and activism. While community organisations surveyed were found to welcome digital tools, doubts surrounded the potential for 'engagement' given that the impact of social media use was difficult to establish (Harris and McCabe, 2017a, 2017b). Harris and McCabe (2017b) noted that engagement with social media platforms was sometimes difficult to establish, and even if measured in terms of clicks and re-tweets, this form of

[17] The term 'global village' refers to the phenomenon of the world shrinking and becoming one thanks to technological advances (McLuhan and Powers, 1989). Coined in the 1960s by the media theorist Marshall McLuhan, the concept alluded to newer technologies of his time including the radio and television, which allowed for instantaneous sharing of culture. While controversial, this idea captured changes in society brought about by those new media forms.

engagement was not found to equate with radical activism. Furthermore, important limitations to adoption by a larger number of organisations was due to a lack of digital skills, resources and time.

In this project, I chose case studies that are internet-enhanced—rather than completely internet-based (Vegh, 2003)—in order to accomplish the functions of awareness and organisation. The activities of community initiatives are internet-enhanced given that digital platforms enhance and promote already existing material work they do on the ground. For instance, initiatives may rely on Facebook to share information but favour in-person meetings to discuss important matters, and, as such, the main activities occur in brick-and-mortar locations. Virtual exchanges only accentuate in-person undertakings since the act of providing food to people is a bodily, face to face communitarian practice.

3. Digital food activism: ICT-enabled media and community initiatives

Tania Lewis (2018) writes of growing entanglements between the digital and the world of food. She suggests that food is a particularly generative space through which to understand the evolving but often hidden role of the digital in everyday lives. The digital food realm is not a unified space but consists of range of fields of practice, technologies, discourse and values that are constantly evolving according to advances in ICTs (Lewis, 2018, p.222). Media sociologist Deborah Lupton (2020) refers to 'digital food cultures' to define the wide range of food-related practices mediated by digital technologies. The term highlights the sociocultural dimensions of food, people and digital technologies, and in particular, the intricacies of food cultures as they are enacted in digital media (Feldman and Goodman, 2021; Lupton, 2020).

Related to the concept of digital food culture is that of 'digital food activism', which concerns ways activities around food are promoted or rebutted through digital media. Tanja Schneider and colleagues (2018, p. 8) define digital food activism 'as an Internet-based, organised effort to change the food system or parts thereof in which civic initiators or supporters use digital media'. Vegh's (2003) distinction of 'internet-enhanced' versus 'internet-based' activism, as previously discussed, is key here given that the type of media platforms chosen by activists and their ways of interacting determine resultant digital food activism (Schneider et al., 2018). In their edited collection *Digital Food Activism*, Schneider et al. (2018) explore the ways digital

media enables changes across the food system and greater social justice. For instance, research conducted by Cross (2020) points to the use of digital media to enable social connections across online networks. In turn, these performances of connectivity associated with digital food media prompt connection within actual, physical communities (Cross, 2020). The notion of space was explored by Bos and Owen (2016, p.1) in their study of websites and social media platforms of alternative food network (AFN) organisations as they sought to establish whether 'the embodied, socio-material reconnection processes that occur in-place also occur online'. Their analysis points to a 'virtual reconnection' that occurs online to a certain extent, that acts as a useful addition to AFNs' offline spaces but does not substitute for tactile experiences found in material spaces (Bos and Owen, 2016).

3.1 Digital food activism against dominant food provisioning systems

Beyond (re)connection, the affordances of the digital realm have enabled actors to come forward in the area of food politics via collectivised forms of virtual-civic engagement that aim to challenge political and business interests. In this chapter, this involves politicised views on issues of hunger and insecurity and their causes and solutions. For example, in Rebecca de Souza's (2019, p.6) study of the concealed politics in US-based spaces of charity she suggests that through volunteering, donating or receiving help, individuals 'bring deep-seated ideologies, social identities, subjectivities' that inform practice and that have the potential to transform food pantries as centres of activism. While they may not openly support any political views, those who run organizations have underlying political ideologies that inevitably influence the operations of the charities, and consequently, poverty governance in general and more specifically in TFNs. For media sociologist Nick Couldry (2015), digital networks such as those enabled by social media platforms can enable transformative politics by facilitating faster political mobilisation and new forms of collective action. Yet, worry remains concerning the long-term consequences of a digitally saturated environment at a time when entities are being almost permanently surveilled (Couldry, 2015). Likewise for the cultural critic Henry Giroux (2015, p.111), producing one's data via easy-to-access platforms can be viewed with suspicion in what he calls 'post-Orwellian' or 'corporate–state surveillance states' that operate via a range of cultural apparatuses that include educational institutions, mainstream media and the Internet. Giroux (2015, p.111) raises concerns about the 'acceptance of a general surveillance culture' marked by personal information that is 'more or less willingly given over to social media and other corporate-based websites', rendering the

details of our daily lives visible, monitored and stored for commercial, security or political purposes. Citing the late sociologist Zygmunt Bauman (2001, p.55), Giroux (2015, p. 134) calls for collective action to challenge 'modern-day authoritarianism' by enacting resistance through critical awareness of state and corporate power: '[d]emocracy expresses itself in continuous and relentless critique of institutions; democracy is an anarchic, disruptive element inside the political system; essential, as a force of dissent and change'. To effectively challenge authority and respond to injustices, dissent must be expressed via 'popular movements dedicated to making education central to any viable notion of politics' and their resulting alternative media and infrastructures (Giroux, 2015, p.132). Engagement in food activism may therefore be seen as a form of dissent in society because it argues for public education and a 'rethink' of the hegemonic systems of production, distribution and consumption of food (Counihan and Siniscalchi, 2013).

In this, food is at the centre of many political and social movements that combine research and activism to enact change. AFNs initially stood in opposition to 'conventional' food provisioning to re-imagine how food is produced, distributed and consumed (Ilbery and Maye, 2005). With the passing of time, AFNs have contributed to the reorganisation of food systems and no longer strictly oppose mainstream agri-food systems but often run parallel to them through the neoliberal politics of choice (Goodman et al., 2012). The difference between alternative and mainstream food dynamics has, to a certain extent, lost its significance (Marsden, 2103), thus giving rise to a new heterogenous foodscape that is as 'transgressive' as it is niche-focused (Goodman and Sage, 2014). AFN initiatives aim for new forms of consumer–producer relations characterised by a shift from 'passive end-users' shoppers to ones that are proactive 'citizen-consumers' with a sense of control over the food they purchase and consume (Johnston et al., 2009; Renting et al., 2012).

Accordingly, engaging in food activism may translate into efforts towards greater agency and more democratic ways of engaging with food, for example, through actions taken against perceived food injustices. Digital technologies have enabled new forms of political and power relations, as shown in the increase of incentives to control information data and visibility (Lupton, 2015). Such power struggles mark digital political engagement and the rise of digital forms of 'food citizenship' where individuals are encouraged to adopt a 'citizen mindset' (FEC, 2017) to shape the food systems for the better. Such a mindset is based on the premise that:

> [I]t is our deeper nature to be Citizens, at our happiest when acting for a purpose that takes us beyond ourselves, and at our fullest when we are shaping what the options are, not just choosing between them (FEC, 2017, p. 6).

Citizens are not motivated by self-interest but rather, a desire to create more value in the food system for all stakeholders, thereby separating themselves from the deeply embedded distance between consumers and producers. In a similar fashion, people who set up and volunteer at community kitchens are 'food citizens' who operate within the realm of the TFNs to promote greater food justice by reconfiguring approaches to accessing and consuming food. Citizens are motivated to engage in meaningful change by tending to their concerns for others through active participation in the local community.

A food justice lens is used in this study because it is a political philosophy that emphasises equity in the ways food is sourced, accessed and consumed (Gottlieb and Joshi, 2013). Community kitchens are initiatives that present unconventional modes of food provisioning to the vulnerable and that seek to enhance social equity. Local food services stand outside of mainstream food provisioning spaces because they unconditionally offer free food to all, but they nevertheless rely on conventional agri-food systems for surplus food and the purchase or donation of supermarket groceries. Initiatives operate in the TFN, an arena marked by heterogenous and typically ephemeral local groups that provides food to a population that is largely marginalised and food insecure.

4. Research methods

4.1 Research design

The data for this chapter draws from three years of a qualitative mixed-method research project on the growing occurrence of community kitchens as one solution to food poverty in southern England. Qualitative research is ideal because it 'seeks answers to questions by examining various social settings and the individuals who inhabit these settings' (Berg, 2009, p. 8). Approval was granted by the Ethics committee of the University of Reading at the start of the fieldwork (January 2017) when I initially contacted organisations to volunteer and observe their operations as a researcher. Prior to this, I had volunteered in various Reading- and Oxford-based community kitchens therefore had some knowledge of their existence and activities. For each of the case studies, consent was given at various times, verbally at first and

in a written format later on by organisation leaders. Observational data was obtained from the ethnographic research conducted at various community kitchens where I volunteered and interacted with users and volunteers. I wrote field notes after every session, paying attention to my feelings as these considerably changed as I became an 'experienced' volunteer and 'leader' myself. A particular aspect of this study's methodology is that I also became a participant in my own study since I run the social media account of Sadaka community kitchen, one of my case studies in this dissertation. Participatory methods were therefore employed as my role in the charity switched from volunteer to member in the case of Sadaka with duties and responsibilities to leaders, volunteers and kitchen users.

For this study—in addition to the participation through Sadaka—I interviewed volunteers who run the social media platforms of their respective charity (see Appendix A for semi-structured interview questions) and I also gathered insights from volunteers who interact with the TFN in digital food space. Service users were consulted as well, but it soon became apparent that few accessed information about these charities online and favoured instead informal routes such as verbal discussions or a printed version of a free food handout list that I updated and regularly circulated. An explanation might be that the target population of these charities is mostly vulnerable and with limited income, who consequently find themselves 'at the wrong side of a dangerous digital divide' as do many women, people living in poverty and those in rural communities (PPC, 2018). For instance, in an effort to make savings while maintaining important frontline services, the UK government has encouraged the use of information technology. Gradually, public services have become digital by default. A report produced by The Low Incomes Tax Reform Group, a charity that aims to improve the tax and benefits experience of low-income earners in the UK, shows that as online channels are prioritized over more traditional forms of communication. This digitisation of services is reinforcing the social exclusion of a sizeable segment of the population (LITRG, 2012) who then have limited access to digital information and resources. Fulfilling obligations such as paying taxes and claiming social benefits have become challenging tasks for those with low levels of digital literacy. The report highlights the strong correlation between digital and social exclusion – and paradoxically, the digitally excluded are likely to be disproportionately heavy users of government services.

4.2 Methods and case studies

Information concerning collective kitchens is increasingly available thanks to ICT-enabled media platforms. Within this informational landscape, stakeholders are more and more turning to digital media to find out about the activities of local initiatives and to get involved. This is because a variety of websites, blogs, social media and mobile apps now 'work to represent, locate and share food-related images, ideas, beliefs and practices in novel ways' (Lupton, 2018, p.66).

In this study and this chapter, I chose organisations that use social media as well as those that do not, in the town of Reading or nearby in Oxford which cater specifically for vulnerable and the most marginal populations and provide different forms of communal eating of cooked food. These organisations are as follows: the Oxford Homeless Project (Oxford), Nishkham SWAT (Reading with headquartered in London), Piaroo's Wish (Reading), Sadaka (Reading) and New Beginnings (Reading). While still part of the TFN, this is a sub-set of the organisations in the TFN conceptualised in Chapter 3. Thus, in this chapter I am not analysing the social media practices by organisations such as surplus food cafés, community cafés, 'pay as you can' cafés or organisations that provide access to surplus food that is not cooked such as community fridges and/or informal foodbanks or food parcel distribution organisations. In analysing and exploring this sub-set of the TFN, I chose to focus on the most popular social media platforms (Twitter, Facebook, Instagram) and other sharing apps (WhatsApp, Google docs) disregarding platforms that were neither free nor user-friendly. I adopted a practice-based approach to media in an attempt to uncover, following Couldry (2012, p. 37), what people do with media in a specific setting for a particular purpose. In my case and using examples of community kitchens as part of the TFN that have emerged in Reading and Oxford, I explored how digital food activism occurs within local-level responses to social inequalities and growing food poverty.

Defining the exact number of individual participants in this study is difficult. Sometimes an 'interview' is a casual conversation over food that is cooked, other times it is an exchange on a chat group, a response to a post on Facebook, a retweet, or a recorded face to face interview in a formal setting. Due to this complexity, it is worth mentioning that I continually checked for consent while engaging with volunteers and kitchen users, so much so that I have had to learn to face explicit refusal to participate in my study, avoidance and even contempt.

Over the course of the years, as I became part of the community of kitchen helpers, then leaders, I was able to gather much richer insights than if I had sought to immediately collect data by interviewing participants or observing for a short period of time. All interviews and informal discussions were transcribed and then analysed using Pardun and Krugman's (1994) procedure of open coding to identify emerging themes and potential categories. Then axial coding was used to fit data into the categorical themes and identify data that explicates the concepts presented in the literature review.

Throughout the research process, I verified my sources and sought evidence supporting what I had heard or seen, for instance by consulting the council's official publications. When users told me about a specific service, such as a new food provider at a night shelter, I went along to the named venue or did an online search to check this information. Communication across service providers immediately appeared lacking, but this is something I sought to improve, and draw on to better understand the TFN. If I could help charities run their services then I assumed leaders would agree to speak with me, which would contribute to richer data collection. Upholding appropriate ethical standards entails mitigating the impact of any research on participants, and as in the case of this research project, this translated into identifying the potential benefits of my involvement and research outputs for both community kitchens and their users. The primary goal of this work was to understand how community kitchens leaders use the digital realm to organise its volunteers and run their services for their users. In every situation, I secured consent for the use of their accounts and sought to assist the groups in any way I could – be it through volunteering, sharing posts, contributing to a meal, or liaising with volunteers to improve service delivery. That way, I did not feel that I was 'extracting' information, and instead, I was reassured that I was conducting research that respects the community and relationships I relied upon to collect data. I focused on forging relationships of trust with users at the outset in order to better understand their needs and reliance on community services such as collective kitchens and how this was facilitated (or not) in the digital realm.

4.3 Short notes on my positionality and engagement with digital food activism

'Offline' food activism by food justice-minded academics uses a wide range of methods including ethnographic approaches, deemed appropriate in the quest for an appreciation of the ways in which dominant food practices are negotiated, appropriated and challenged

(Counihan and Siniscalchi, 2013). These methods enable researchers to look at the different forms of food activism in their social and cultural context and its link to economic, political, and ideological forces.

I began desk-based, online research in September 2016 like all ethnographers, navigating the fine line between my role as a participant and an observer, involved but aiming to remain detached throughout the fieldwork. Alexander Koensler and Amalia Rossi (2012, p. 15, cited in Counihan and Siniscalchi, 2013) observe that this tension is common in the study of activism:

> the study of social movements, in fact, often involves tension between the disengaged posture of scientific observation and the ideological beliefs of the researcher. This can call into question the theoretical foundations, results, and boundaries of ethnographic work, and causes numerous dilemmas in the ethnographic relationships with activists.

The more research I conducted, however, the less detached I was which means that my observations were increasingly affected by my stance as a participant and activist, which inevitably affected the progression of the research. I chose to explore social media and promote its use across charities because I realised its benefits to the causes that charities advocate for, in this case, the reduction of food poverty and the access to healthy food for all. My personal use of digital platforms was also a determining factor. As such, I became an 'active netnographer' who contribute 'to real lives, real places, and real causes' (Ciolan and Manasia, 2017, p.8), learning new ways to interact on behalf of a food charity, Sadaka, in particular, and with other online communities. In that respect, Schneider and colleagues (2018, p. iv) add a note about bias in the introduction to their edited publication *Digital Food Activism*:

> The authors in this anthology are not dispassionate observers of digital activism. We study, analyze, and criticize digital activism because we want it to succeed. We want to see a new world in which citizens can use digital technologies to exercise their political power more effectively.

My desire to conduct research in digital activism equally stems from a personal interest and engagement with digital media but also from the realisation that a strong online presence using ICT-enabled media can tremendously boost the activities and survival of local community initiatives. I also feel strongly about the cause that my case studies support, which is the alleviation of food poverty and the provision of services to those undergoing hardship

of any kind in their everyday. While I see digital media as a powerful tool that bridges gaps between the public, activists, events and ideas, I have nevertheless sought to retain a critical approach to digital media use throughout my analysis.

5. Results and discussion

5.1 Promotion and communication: 'sharing is caring'

Online platforms that offer support to charities, such as the National Council for Voluntary Organisations' Knowhow, encourage charities to use social media to create and share information, ideas, interests or images (NCVO, 2019). Three of these 'virtual communities' in particular - Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn - are presented as versatile tools that allow direct communication between charities and their audience, without any intermediaries, unlike press or advertising. This can forge 'real time' relationships where charity leaders have more control over the form and content of their messages. Informal, two-way conversations may be an asset to charities; however, these may also facilitate criticism and conflicts visible to anyone with access to those platforms. Therefore, the greatest strength of social media is also its potential flaw: it connects people who would not normally get together, allowing both fruitful exchanges and, at times, uncontrollable disputes (Langlois et al., 2009). For all that, as identified by the National Council for Voluntary Organisations, social media facilitates six key operations including fundraising, campaigning, brand building, building communities, finding volunteers and internal communication (NCVO, 2018, 2019).

Along the same lines, Harris and McCabe's (2017a, 2017b) review of social media use by community groups found that beyond enabling social support and networking, social media allows the dissemination of community development values across its networks. Another important aspect of social media that explains its widespread use is its affordability, as pointed to by Bos and Owen (2106, p.12). Establishing and keeping an online presence is a low-cost strategy for TFN initiatives because it simplifies tasks such as advertising, fundraising or recruiting volunteers. By contrast, setting up a website, keeping it up to date and writing regular blog entries demands more skills and resources for community initiatives.

In the TFN organisations that were part of this study, many groups use online space to fundraise and communicate about their activities. For examples, fundraising is made simple thanks to platforms such as JustGiving, as illustrated by Figures 4, 5 and 6 on the next pages. To assist with online fundraising, the platform website features the following instructions (JustGiving, 2019) :

> [these tools] enable you to fundraise online quickly and simply. We are dedicated to giving fundraisers the technology they need to raise more and change more lives. With JustGiving you can raise money for a charity or a personal cause and share your appeal on social media in just minutes. It costs nothing to set up a page but we do charge a small fee on donations.

Furthermore, Figure 6 on the next page shows how TFN initiatives link their JustGiving page to their social media account, whereas Figure 5, next to Figure 6, illustrates how foodbanks similarly communicate about donations made via the same fundraising platform. Following the fundraising tips (Figure 4, below), I regularly posted about the Sadaka JustGiving fundraising pages on the charity's Facebook wall (tip 4) and shared updates on social media pages to let supporters know how much money had been raised and how many meals served thanks to donations (tip 8). This information prompts potential donors to consider contributing to the activities of the charity and additionally, it constitutes free advertising for both the charity and the fundraising operator. At Sadaka, I directly and publicly thanked contributors by commenting or resharing our charity or partners' posts; this practice was apparently well received overall according to Facebook metrics such as 'likes', numbers of 'people reached' or 'engagements'.

Figure 4. Just Giving fundraising tips. Source: JustGiving, 2019.

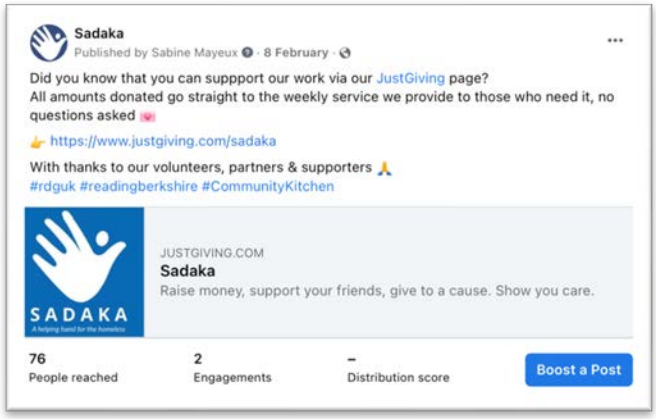


Figure 5. (Left) A tweet by the Trussell Trust asking for funds by referring followers to their JustGiving page and asking them to re-tweet (RT).

Figure 6. (Right) Example of a Facebook post I created to share a link to the charity Sadaka's JustGiving page and to thank contributors.

Creating a fundraising page is easy but nevertheless demands digital skills when it comes to designing engaging visuals. For important events, food charities may recruit a professional photographer and furthermore, funding may be allocated for subscriptions to professional design software such as Adobe's Creative Cloud Apps or Canva Pro. While it is possible to

directly upload images with a description on social media pages, the use of graphic design software enables the creation of attractive content. While applications claim the ease of creating graphics, photo collages and posters, the reality is that acquiring skills to produce engaging online material is demanding for most charity leaders in this study, including myself as social media lead for the charity Sadaka. Two important factors led to an increase of 'virtual reconnection' via social media for the charity Sadaka, for example. One was the COVID-19 pandemic that encouraged paperless communication and the second was volunteers' growing distrust of platforms such as WhatsApp and Facebook where they do not want their personal information shared. I initially experimented with free tools provided by Google Photos to create collages and the iPhone built-in Photo app to add text or stickers to a photo, but I soon upgraded to the platform Canva due to the latter's intuitive drag-and-drop interface for the creation of infographics and social media posts. On the next page, Figures 7 and 8 illustrate the types of posts that I learnt to create to communicate about the weekly meals served by Sadaka, where information is clearly presented and where neither names nor pictures of volunteers are shown.

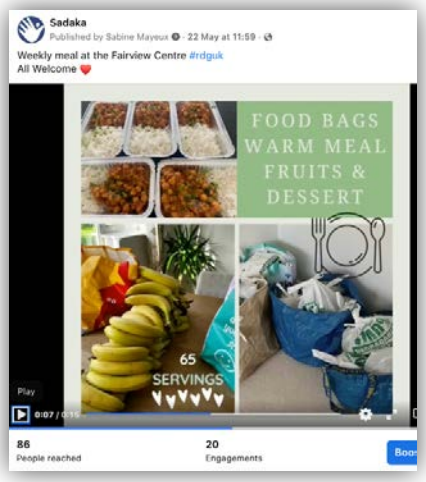


Figure 7. (Left) Screenshot of an animated collage summarising a Saturday session at Sadaka.

Figure 8. (Right) Post I created using the software 'Piktochart' to announce the distribution of cartons of milk at the upcoming Sadaka meal.

For charity leaders at Piaroo's Wish and the Oxford Homeless Project, sharing pictures of sessions is the easiest way to communicate about their activities and anything else was time consuming and not necessarily better received by their followers: "I just make a post to ask what I need, I do it quickly when I am at work and we get donations and volunteers, it doesn't

take much time at all" (Piaroo's Wish KL, 2018)[18]. Conversely, the charity New Beginnings, similar to Sadaka, carefully considers content that is shared and relies on for-a-fee graphic design tools to produce regular social media posts. This difference can be explained by the registered status of the two charities and the funding streams available to them, which require a more "professional online presence" and "good branding just like a business, even if that business is to help people with food" (Sadaka KL, 2020).

More widely for the TFNs of this study, there is increasing pressure for professional-type websites, especially since the start of the of the COVID-19 pandemic; furthermore, a professional-looking website gives a favourable impression of charities' activities, which is attractive to potential volunteers and donators. Prior to the pandemic, TFN community groups online presence would consist of a social media page, usually Facebook and occasionally Instagram or Twitter, and a website, such as one that can be built with the free blogging hosting platform WordPress.com. A free and easy-to-use social website builder, Wordpress.com requires little technical knowledge and therefore stands as a cost-effective option for small food organisations. With time and as traffic increases, it is common for TFN charities to move to more advanced website platforms using the help of knowledgeable volunteers or by raising funds to cover costs associated with the creation of a professional-looking website, as was the case with New Beginnings and Sadaka. A professional-looking website informs the public of the organisation's activities and helps build 'brand' awareness but comes at a cost given that it demands more skills and time from core volunteers to update on a regular basis.

By comparison, running and updating social media pages require considerably less effort for kitchen leaders, as shown in Figure 9 below, where I illustrate how a Sadaka Facebook page admin may swiftly communicate about a session using information shared in the charity's WhatsApp group. This process is facilitated by the 'manage' tabs where administrators of a page, such as me, are given options to support fundraising efforts, share information or keep track of engagement, for instance (Figure 10, on the next page). Initiatives that were not included in this study make little to no use of social media platforms for two reasons,

[18] To ensure confidentiality and privacy of participants, their accounts are referred to using the following format, as with the previous chapter: Name of TFN initiative followed by role (V for Volunteer and KL for Kitchen Leader) and year of data collection. Direct speech is reported using double quotation marks to avoid confusion.

according to charity leaders: one is that they had been established for a long time, as is the case for Faith Christian Group or Christian Church Action in Reading, and two is that they had a centralised centre of operation that managed communication, based in London for the Sikh charity Nishkam SWAT.

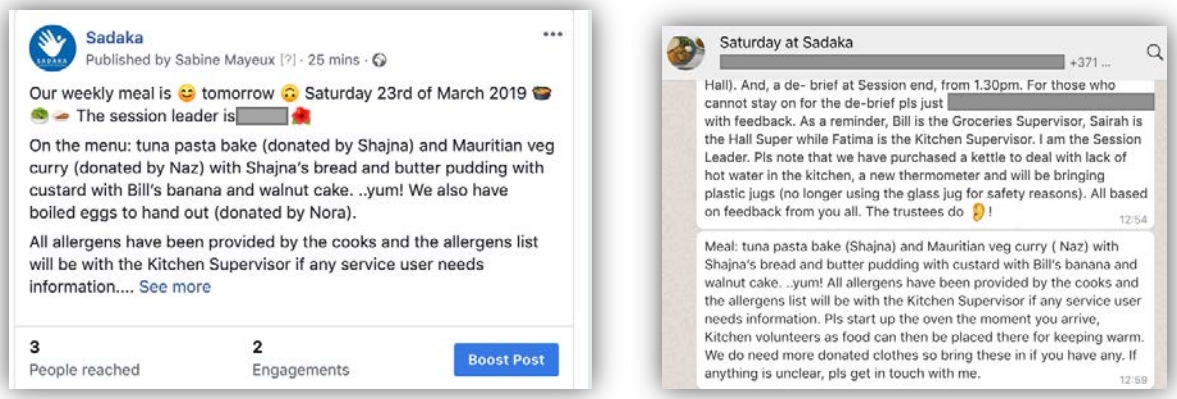


Figure 9. Facebook post detailing next session's menu (Left) based on communication via WhatsApp (Right) for Sadaka.

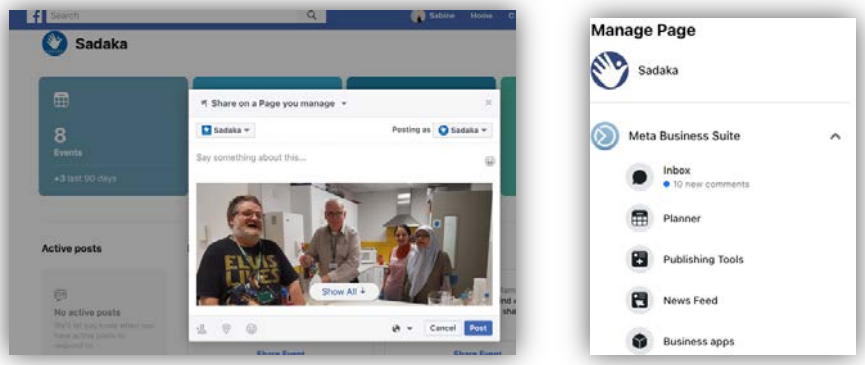


Figure 10. Managing a Facebook page. Left: 'Managing my page' tab prior to the name change of the Facebook parent company to 'Meta'. Right: The 'Manage Page' sidebar subsequent to Facebook's name change.

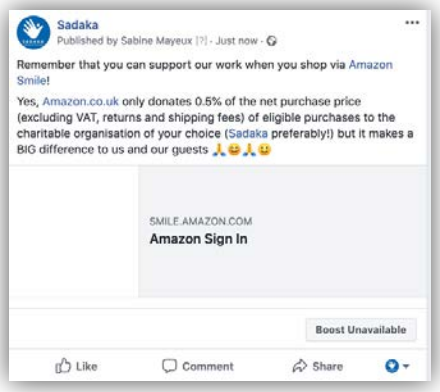


Figure 11. Post to request donations via the Amazon Smile scheme affiliated with Sadaka.

As shown above in Figures 10 and 11, sharing information about the activities of the TFN Sadaka is a straightforward endeavour that nevertheless demands staying up to date with the ephemerality of the TFN. The initiative Piaroo's Wish's regular updates on their pages according to changes in their venue, often due to last minute constraints, illustrates the ephemerality that characterises TFNs. Unlike a website that requires skills and time to update, a social media post is easily created, shared and added to/commented on amongst followers. Adding information about new fundraising streams, as illustrated above in Figure 11 with a post to encourage donations via Amazon Smile—an online platform embedded within Amazon that donates 0.5% of eligible purchases to charities that have registered to the scheme—is also quick and easy. Accordingly, 'feeding' the organisation's page by creating a couple of posts takes little time for charity leaders in this study, and it constitutes an affordable tool to instantly share information that is accessible to a wide audience for comment. All charity leaders created a Facebook account by default, which is explained by the size of the social network platform. With 2.2 billion active monthly users in January 2018 (Press, 2018) and an estimated 25 billion average monthly visits in 2020, a 3% increase on the year before (Molla, 2021), the advertising-dependent business model of Facebook is by far the dominant player in the social media market (Yeung, 2019) and therefore one that continues to attract a high number of users, businesses and groups of various nature.

Despite the relatively ease of use and affordability of social media platforms, building and maintaining a digital presence can nevertheless be challenging for small organisations with limited resources, which characterises TFN initiatives. It then follows that larger and established food charities must find securing a strong online presence largely achievable. Yet, this is not always the case: in Reading, established organisations with access to reliable funding from local authorities, foundations or donors, such as Faith Christian Group, only occasionally communicate via their social media platforms but they share information via email. The London-based charity Nishkam SWAT regularly posts online while its Reading-based group does not have distinct social media accounts; all content is shared by the charity's head office. With both examples, an explanation for the scarce online presence concerns charities' long-standing activities in the area and their embeddedness in the community via their members, which means that they need little online advertising or campaigning to

support their activities. For example, Nishkam SWAT benefits from a large pool of volunteers from the Sikh community who regularly donate, cook and serve food at sessions, as explained by one of the charity leaders: "we could advertise what we do but it's a lot of work and besides, other charities in Reading need to be in the spotlight more than us" (Nishkam SWAT KL, 2019).

Another reason for lack of online presence for charities that are well-established concerns demographics: as identified by Bos and Owen (2016, p. 7) in their work on online AFNs, age can be a barrier when regular volunteers are older adults who are often less active online than younger generations. As more and more food initiatives build an online presence, younger generations are drawn to their operations but in view of the time-consuming nature of volunteering, younger people typically constitute a minority within their volunteering base. In that respect, a charity leader at Sadaka highlighted the unreliability of students who typically volunteered for a short period during the academic year; furthermore, albeit enthusiastic, young people were 'inexperienced' and therefore required more supervision than older volunteers who volunteered for longer periods of time. For older generations at the TFN community kitchens in this study, social media engagement was reported as not being necessary for recruitment, and it was not deemed important to retain them as volunteers either. Conversely, however, professionals mentioned hearing about the charity they volunteered for through a shared post on a friend's social media platform, which indicates the importance of an online presence for recruiting and keeping volunteers. While the qualitative data collected for this study do not allow for generalisations to be made, findings suggest that the dissemination of information on social media about the activities of TFNs initiatives plays an important role in the promotion of their work towards the alleviation of poverty and in securing support in the long term.

Beyond promotion and fundraising, social media use is a valuable organisational tool. Using the theory of scalable sociality, Daniel Miller and colleagues (2016) sought to understand how social media has created new spaces for groups between the public and the private. His research team found that thanks to social media, communication is not restricted to private or public broadcasting but that it instead occurs amongst various sizes of audience and degrees of privacy (Miller et al., 2016). Posting online is about sharing and building relationships with others. The theory of 'polymedia' also applies here since online platforms

cannot be understood in isolation given that users rely on various platforms or media for particular types of interaction. For example, volunteers at Sadaka, Piaroos' Wish and New Beginnings schedule and plan sessions via WhatsApp and all three use Facebook, Instagram or Twitter when reporting to a large audience, campaigning for funds or requesting donations. The digital is used to strengthen and complete other forms of sociability, for instance when busy schedules or COVID-19 restrictions do not allow kitchen leaders to meet in person. In this instance, WhatsApp groups along with other tools such as Google sheets for rosters and OneDrive to share documents provide free and easy-to-use virtual spaces for discussions regarding the way weekly sessions are organised. In line with the work of Miller et al. (2016) and with some of the findings of Rainie and Wellman (2104) in their book *Networked*, findings suggest that online relationships among TFN leaders are a continuation of offline exchanges, and not at their expense. My findings are also similar to observations made by Bos and Owen (2016, p.1) concerning online spaces in the context of AFNs given that online interactions amongst kitchen leaders, volunteers and the public were also found to be 'supplementary rather than as a substitution for socio-material reconnections' and as such, proved invaluable for the on-going provision of food aid to the community.

5.2 Digital activism for greater civic participation and food justice

Research has shown that the use of the internet can have a positive impact on civic engagement in view of its capacity to promote political knowledge, interest and discussion even though some individuals lack necessary digital competencies to take part in the information age (Mossberger et al., 2008). The 'political' is undoubtably a contested concept. To better grasp the notion of political engagement, the media scholar Peter Dahlgren (2002) built on the notion of 'civic culture' to include cultural dimensions such as discussions or 'deliberative democracy' as prerequisites for political engagement. The concept of civic culture points to features of everyday socio-cultural practices that enable democratic participation via engagement in civil society, the public sphere and political groups (Dahlgren, 2002, 2003). Dahlgren (2002, p.10) notes the prominent role played by 'the self as a reflexive project, an ongoing process of the shaping and reshaping of identity' in response to multiple forces and contexts in modern society. This, in turn, influences people's identities as citizens, and consequently, their 'sense of belonging to social collectivities and to their perceived possibilities for participating in societal development' (ibid.). Even though digital media was still in its initial stages at the time of Dahlgren's writing in the early 2000's, his work

nevertheless tackled how emerging media promotes civic competencies and identities, and in the context of digital activism, is a useful lens to understand the formation of 'food citizens'.

Furthermore, the idea of networked individualism (Rainie and Wellman, 2014) helps us understand how individuals come together in the digital realm to challenge existing structures. The use of new social media platforms that allow independence from traditional institutions, cultural traditions and modes of actions is not a move towards more individual action, on the contrary: for Wellman et al. (2006), 'rather than operating at the expense of the 'real' face-to-face world, [the internet] is an extension, with people using all means of communication to connect with friends and relatives'. Internet-aided activism in the political, everyday realm therefore offers a range of new possibilities and a degree of individuality (Wellman et al., 2006). The concept of networked individualism provides a useful lens through which to analyse the systems that facilitate individual action within networks, such as those that exist with the TFN initiatives. What Rainie and Wellman (2104) refer to as a 'networked operating systems' is what give individuals freedom to act on their own, as food citizens but nonetheless networked. Concurrently, networked individuals must resort to alliances and develop both in-person and electronic strategies to pursue their social engagement, switching among subnetworks if needed.

In the Reading and Oxford TFNs, volunteers frequently contribute to other causes such as local food growing or faith-based projects. Community kitchens are run by individuals whose online interactions are not constrained by their respective charities' policies, but who can freely engage with other community groups. These networked individuals have what Rainie and Wellman (2014) call 'partial membership in multiple networks' and furthermore, they are not expected to retain permanent membership in any given group. Community kitchen volunteers make use of their vast networks to run their charities' activities, for example to source food or funding streams, find a new premise or schedule training. For example, the charity Sadaka requires that its volunteers refrain from expressing religious, political or any other personal views that may create tension among volunteers on the shared chat groups, but the charity does not have guidelines that forbid volunteers from becoming strong advocates within faith-based organisations. For all that, disagreements have occurred, for example when a charity partner began sharing social media posts that were overtly critical of local authorities. This was not acceptable because good links with all service providers are

crucial to the durability of the charity, especially when the charity runs its service from council-owned premises. Rainie and Wellman's (2014, p. 12) allusion to 'looser and diverse social networks' that necessitate 'more choreography' is particularly relevant here because as people become more geographically and ideologically dispersed, they are less embedded in groups and instead, become participants in diversified social networks. However, leaders must ensure that the charity's best interests are served and satisfactorily represented on social media where members of the public, service users, partners and potential funders may interact. When I questioned a kitchen leader whether they controlled online communication, they compared running a charity to the release of a song (Piaroo's Wish KL, 2019):

> "we have copyrights to the song but we cannot control how people respond and use our music once it's released. We try to keep an eye on what's said about us, we monitor our Facebook group but we know we can't control what people say about us online or in the community"

In digital networks, individuals are less permanently tied to groups but increasingly spatially dispersed and part of ever-changing networks, and they are more and more connected as individuals as opposed to members of a given group. Following Wellman's notion of networked individualism, people are at the centre of their networks, both online and in person, connected to other networked individuals (Iliadis, 2012). For example, a Sadaka volunteer started an initiative on social media to collect funds independently of the charity. Because this volunteer regularly baked desserts for the charity prior to the start of the pandemic, they started selling cakes and bread loaves for which all proceeds went to their chosen charity, Sadaka. Donations were collected via the fundraising platform JustGiving, totalling £1241 in under two years of her starting what became a fundraising campaign. This initiative is an example of networked individualism where individual effort is put in towards a collective goal, an endeavour facilitated by social media platforms such as Facebook and Instagram that are used to liaise with the public and supporters through regular posts and stories. This volunteer mentioned being inspired by initiatives that 'have strong activism links and use food as a way to connect, unite and raise awareness', citing the work of Jack Monroe, the social enterprise 'Luminary Bakery' and the charity 'Migrateful', all of which have a strong online presence. This is a description of the volunteer's campaign on the JustGiving website, referred to as the fundraiser's 'story' (JustGiving, 2022):

> "Like many of us during lockdown I started baking, and thought I'd try sourdough bread. After several attempts, including 'starters' dying, YouTube videos and an online course, I've just about mastered a basic sourdough loaf. So I thought I'd put my lockdown hobby to some use before the restrictions lift and we all go back to normal. I've been involved with the local charity - SadakaGives since Jan 2019. We provide hot meals and a few essentials for the homeless & vulnerable every Saturday. We are currently looking to raise funds for coffee, tea, sugar & washing powder and a few other essential toiletries - items the service users have requested. ALL money goes direct to Sadaka" (Sadaka V, 2020).

As illustrated in the above example, low-cost digital activities are in some instances a steppingstone towards enduring involvement (Harris and McCabe, 2017a, p.20). It is also a form of food activism, following Counihan and Siniscalchi (2013), that aims to transform economic or social relations through the expression of dissent or—in this case—support. Here, digital food activism makes use of online platforms and networks to raise funds for the community kitchen Sadaka.

Beyond individual activism, food initiatives give varying emphases to democratic and economic goals, and at times, opt for the sole goal of serving food on a regular basis to those who need it and re-purpose food that would otherwise go to waste. When I asked a Sadaka leader if they considered themselves an 'activist', they replied:

> "what is a "kitchen activist"? Sorry I normally associate "activists" with those that want to change things and go on marches. I'm probably too out of date on these things" (Sadaka KL, 2019).

While community kitchen leaders and volunteers may not explicitly participate in politics by taking action such as protesting or writing to their MP to support their cause, they nevertheless propose an alternative to the mainstream food systems through their support and activities related to the TFN. In line again with Counihan and Siniscalchi (2013), this alternative approach to immediate, free and 'emergency' food distribution and consumption can lead to greater social and economic justice. Through the redistribution of food surplus to the food insecure, the charity Sadaka challenges existing power structures by reminding its volunteers that they have political and 'citizenly' agency, as exemplified by a message from a trustee on a shared WhatsApp group:

> "Enjoy the facts & figures below as evidence of what you all have supported.
> Thank you from all the trustees at Team Sadaka:
> Figures from FoodCloud:
> From 01/01/2018 to 31/12/2018 it is ESTIMATED that Sadaka:

Collected 74 food surplus donations
Meal Equivalent 4983 meals
Kg Weight 2265 kgs
Co2 Savings 7249 kgs"
(Sadaka KL, 2019)

The response to the above message was initially one of surprise due to the large quantities of food that would have otherwise gone to waste. Further comments praised the charity for acting against waste and food poverty. For kitchen leaders, communicating about the activities of the charity is necessary to show how volunteers act as concerned citizens. Sadaka was started in Reading following the example of the Oxford Homeless Project which provides food to the growing homeless and vulnerable population of East Oxford. The OHP leaders did not set up a registered charity but nevertheless found that the community responded positively to the initiative, as detailed by the following statement:

> "we get many food donations from people, we never run out of food or volunteers, it shows what we do is needed and well received. I go online, post pictures with no filter or anything and that's all I do, people respond and it works. Three years and we are still here, serving more and more people' (Oxford Homeless Project KL, 2019).

The online presence of community kitchens exposes the problem of food poverty in the community, its response and how the public may get involved. In that sense, digital activism, and digital food activism specifically, enables greater social justice, community empowerment, all of which lead to more support for those in need as a Sadaka leader put it:

> "I am thinking about what we could simplify using technology. Except for our social media and the WhatsApp group, I can't think of anything. We have to serve meals and be there don't we?" (Sadaka KL, 2019).

The initiative Piaroo's Wish exclusively plans its sessions on Facebook, which demands a constant presence on behalf of its leaders, but results in a favourable response from their followers and the wider community:

> "I see a response, and literally, I respond, I do this at work, when I am back at mine, anytime I can. We do everything online, the community is that great at responding to our posts" (Piaroo's Wish KL, 2018).

Figure 12 below is an example of engagement facilitated by digital platforms that enable community-based food justice organising. Service leaders share feedback on sessions to thank those who contributed with donations of food, or through the preparation of meals that were distributed to service users or 'guests'. Such messages not only inform the public

of the initiative's activities, but it also serves as a reminder that donated food "goes a long way", which suggests the success of efforts aimed at providing a service to the community. In the words of the Piaroo's Wish kitchen leader, such efforts would not be possible without the help of "everyone who donated food, toiletries, clothes, drinks and time" (Figure 12, image on the left).

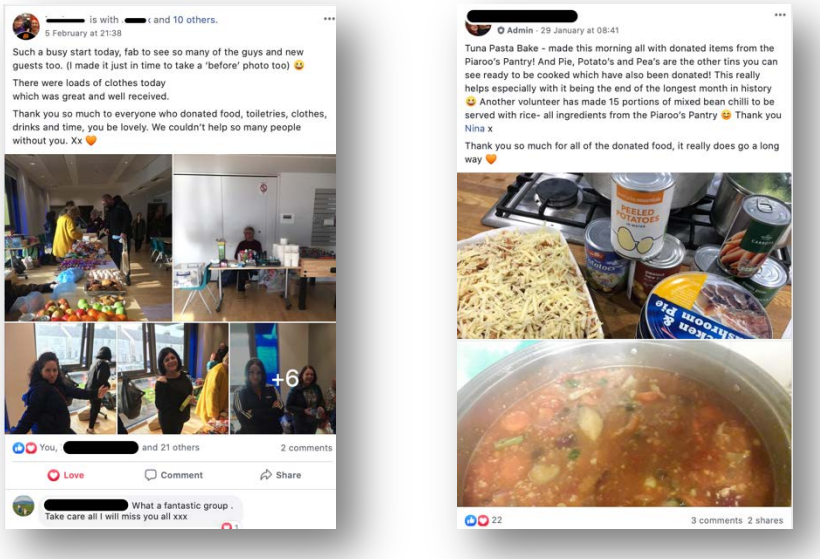


Figure 12. Piaroo's Wish Facebook posts thanking its community for donations, drafted by kitchen leaders.

These posts are an example of 'cooperative efforts of mutual support and inspiration' (Broad, 2016, p. 16, cited in Mann, 2020, p. 156) that can be seen as local storytelling, told online among members of the public thus promoting further participation opportunities in citizen-led projects (Mann, 2020). Accordingly, online communication prompts networked partnerships and plays a key role in the participatory culture or ethos that is central to social media platforms such as Facebook (Lupton, 2020) and, fundamentally as argued in this chapter, the successful running of community kitchens within TFNs by volunteers who take responsibility against injustices as food-citizens. This participatory culture emphasises the ease of online communication thanks to digital technologies whereas the sharing ethos highlights the interactive nature of material that is shared online (Lupton, 2019). Therefore, findings suggest that digital activism enables the practice of food justice by opening new possibilities for social and political change; this is achieved through civic engagement that challenges unequal access to food and other necessities.

5.3 'Are you on Facebook'? Surviving online or perishing offline in TFNs

Social media and digital platforms are now invaluable tools for the largest charities in the UK and worldwide, such as the Red Cross.[19] Research on the Red Cross's use of social media for building relations with volunteers, community and media suggests that social media's two-way dialogue improves service, media coverage and feedback (Briones et al., 2011). The social media strategy of the Red Cross exhibits dialogic principles and communality yet the main barriers for the large charity to social media use, according to Briones et al. (2011), are staff knowledge and time constraints, which are also hurdles for smaller charities despite differing budgets. While larger charities benefit from paid staff and substantial resources to manage their online presence, small charities such as community kitchens tend to rely on volunteers and 'donated' time to run their social media accounts. Evaluating engagement is crucial in order to assert the reach of posts and usefulness of volunteers' time allocated to the online dissemination of information, however, this is not typically done by non-professionals of social media management, and therefore, uncommon among community kitchen leaders within this study's TFNs.

Similar to Harris & McCabe's (2017b) research, organisations in this study reported rarely tracking metrics except in rare cases when a knowledgeable volunteer joined their team and sought to make changes to the ways charities interacted online. The issue is that experienced website developers and communications officers have limited time to allocate to the charity, given their demanding work schedule. Therefore, they may build the website, assist volunteers in the management of social media accounts and only occasionally update the charity's website. Digital output via social media appears more accessible to non-professional communication audiences as opposed to output via websites and newsletters. Accordingly, some charity volunteers may learn to create and schedule content by using software such as Canva or InDesign, but they do not typically monitor engagement on their social media platforms. A professional webmaster for the charity Sadaka mentioned tracking visits to the website as well social media pages to identify ways to improve coverage, reach and search engine optimisation (SEO). However, this was not a concern for leaders who helped run the social media pages of other TFN initiatives in this study. For these grassroots organisations, what matters most is not engagement metrics, but establishing an online presence. In that respect, the scholar David Karpf (2016) explores the limits of analytics tracking by questioning

[19] The Red Cross is a 'super-major' charity with an income above £100m (NCVO, 2018).

how to gauge the success of digital campaigns. The question pertains to whether output and numbers of followers are synonymous with success (Karpf, 2010, p.155):

> [s]o more followers, more tweets, and more re-tweets are all good. What does this mean for measuring success in digital activism? Is a digital activist with five thousand followers more successful than one with fifty? If we tweet and get re-tweeted often enough, will that actually accomplish our goals? The answer, of course, is that it all depends on what you are trying to accomplish in your campaign.

In line with this statement, charities such as those in the TFNs may not seek numerous followers, 'likes' or page views. Rather, as stated by all charity leaders in this study, fewer but meaningful engagements with key stakeholders, volunteers and members of the public are preferable to abundant but occasional interest. The aim is to sustain interest in the long-term. Furthermore, and similar to large charities' challenge with time and staff constraints, smaller organisations may not have the capacity to monitor incoming messages, for example. More engagement might lead to more enquiries, which is not always manageable for charity volunteers. A charity leader noted that interest in their charity tended to correlate with end-of-year celebrations and incidental coverage in the news, but that such interest 'was not always a blessing because of limited resources' (Nishkam SWAT KL, 2019). On a personal level, early on in my research—and at times throughout it—my messages to charities via social media platforms were rarely answered, if at all. I later learnt that this silence was due to unmonitored accounts, or poor communication amongst digital media administrators and charity leaders.

For all the above, TFN initiatives must gauge whether their online presence is 'useful'. If a successful online presence might be measured in terms of numbers of followers or volumes of likes, as posited by Karpf (2016), does this successful engagement equate with digital activism? Should organisations track 'blogroll' mentions, hyperlinks, site traffic or total volume of comments per week? Karpf (2016, p.156) asks how and what should be measured in the world of digital politics, '[i]f we can't judge Twitter influence directly by follower counts, Facebook strength by friend totals, or blog authority by hyperlinks alone'. Today, if the strategic logic of digital activism remains unclear in terms of tracking engagement, the growing amount of world wide web research conducted is a testament to the opportunities that ICT innovation provides across disciplines. And, in the case of community kitchens, findings point to the potential of social media and other digital tools in the creation of links between groups, which in turn, strengthens the support offered to their target population,

service users who are food insecure. In that respect, Harris and McCabe (2017b) question the transformative power of social media. In that respect, Couldry (2014) asks about transformative networked action and the possibility of networked action through social media platforms. The TFN initiatives Sadaka and New Beginnings, as small, registered charities, have created links with locally commissioned services such as those provided by St Mungo's or Launchpad,[20] as shown by their presence in the centre of Reading town on a National World Homeless Day (WHD), celebrated on October 10th. This event is an opportunity to showcase the issue of homelessness worldwide via the physical presence of locally commissioned service providers in the city centres. In the town of Reading, two community kitchens were invited on WHD 2019 given their favourable rapport with the local authorities. Figure 10 shows that my retweet of a Connect Reading[21] tweet on that day which illustrates both 'real' and 'virtual' partnerships, reinforced by social media posts such as those in Figures 13 and 14 and 15 (on the next pages). According to leaders at Sadaka and New Beginnings, such links are favourably perceived by funding bodies who scrutinise social media platforms during the application process, and who welcome social media engagement that provide 'evidence' on how funds were spent e.g., numbers of meals served, type of support provided via funded projects and incurrences of public outreach campaigns.

[20] Locally commissioned services provide care, support or supervision on a client's behalf by a public authority. Housing-related and adult social care support services are relevant to this study, which are delivered by a partnership of charities and statutory organisations in the town Reading, such as Launchpad for homelessness prevention and supported accommodation, St Mungo's for street outreach and the Salvation Army for multi-disciplinary support (RBC, 2022a).

[21] Connect Reading is a non-profit organisation that connect organisations and businesses in Greater Reading (CR, 2022).

Figure 13. Sadaka re-tweet of Connect Reading's tweet showing Sadaka and New Beginnings at their 2019 World Homeless stands in Reading town centre

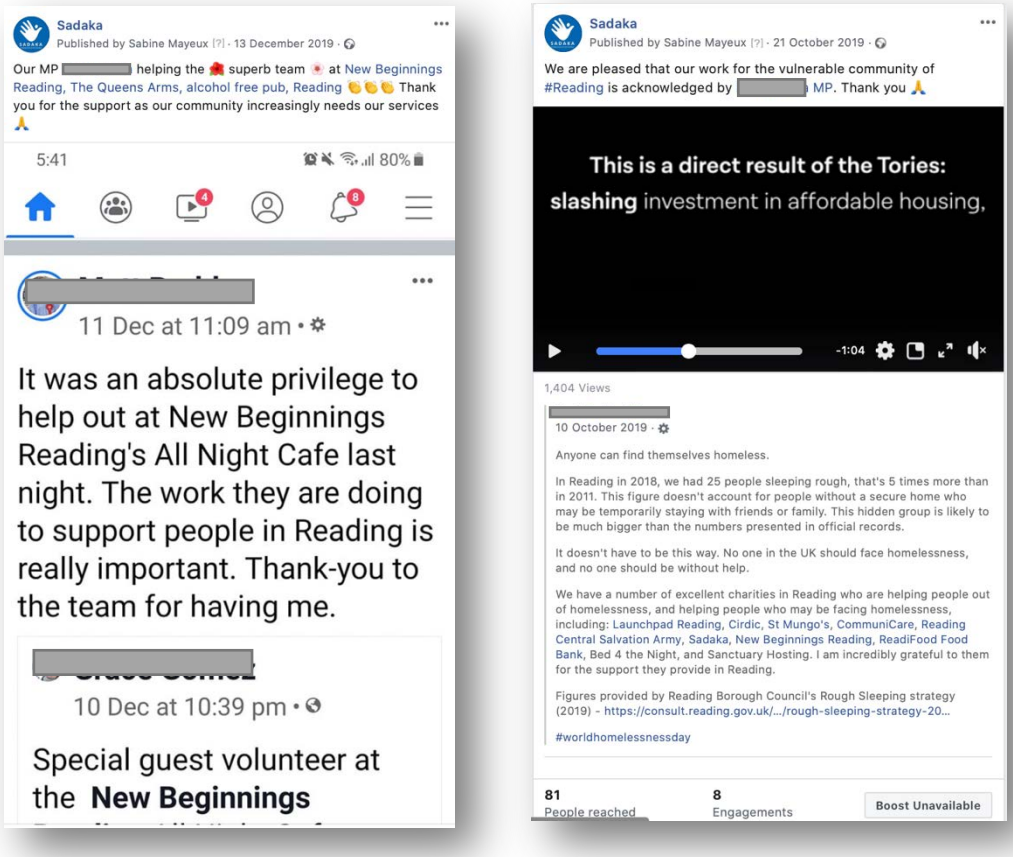


Figure 14. Sadaka Facebook post where I shared Reading's MP posts listing Sadaka and other TFN initiatives as 'excellent charities who are helping people out of homelessness'.

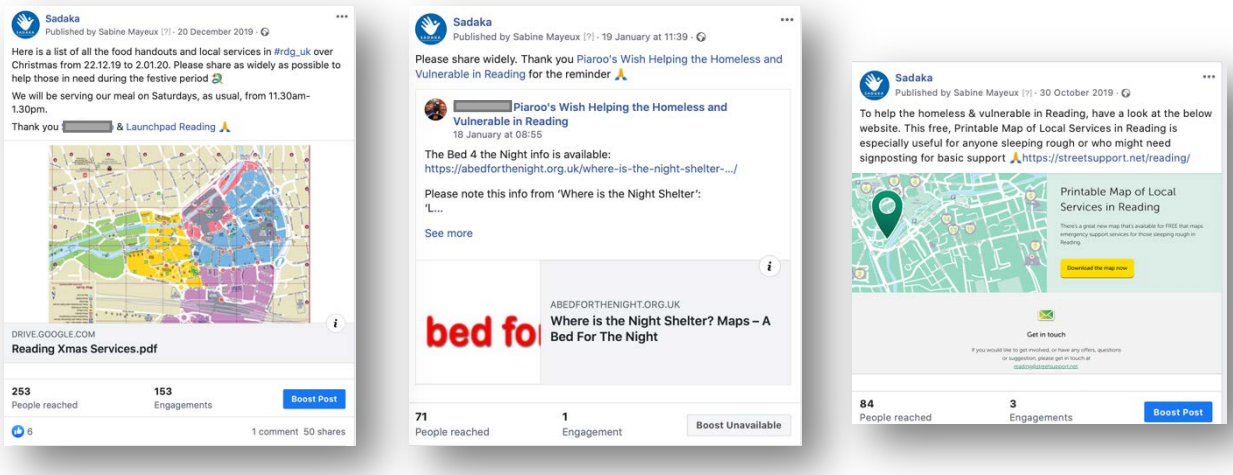


Figure 15. Facebook posts showing partnerships between small TFN initiatives (Sadaka and Piaroo's Wish) and commissioned services such as Launchpad, Bed for the Night and Street Support.

The previous figures are examples of links— in 'real' life and online—that have the potential to enhance existing services in/for the community. Partnerships are especially desirable for

community kitchen leaders within the TFNs, as expressed by a Nishkam SWAT leader for whom improved links between commissioned services and charities would not only ameliorate support for the vulnerable but ensure that charities share limited resources (Nishkam SWAT KL, 2019). The Reading Sikh community, as previously discussed, does not have their own local social media accounts, but they are part of national network with headquarters in London. According to a charity leader, aiming for a local social media presence could help communicate about the group's activities, but it would require skills and time, and, furthermore, given its strong and supportive community among the Sikhs in the borough, a Reading-based online presence would not necessarily improve the service they provide to the vulnerable community. As expected, lack of time and poor digital skills were reported as common barriers to an online presence and liaising with potential partners. Yet, TFN charity leaders gradually welcomed my incentive to prepare and circulate a list of food services in the town. At first this was in paper format based on an existing inaccurate list circulated by the oldest Reading-based charity for the homeless, Faith Christian Group, and later the list was digitalised during the COVID-19 pandemic to minimise risks of transmission. Efforts at sharing online information during the pandemic were necessary but they demanded skills that volunteers did not necessarily have. While digital tools can enable better services for the vulnerable, they also influence the type of volunteers who join charities given that basic digital competencies increasingly matter when choosing to volunteer and help run charities.

All TFN charities in this study use social media to communicate with their target audience, namely the general public, their volunteers and partner charities. Funding bodies and institutions are referred to as 'partners' because they enable the work of projects they support. One of the key findings of this study is that organisations operating in Reading have had to 'go digital to become real' given, for example, the fact that the local council or other funding bodies verify the digital presence of these organisations for them to be deemed viable enough to be considered for funding from the local authorities and related bodies. During the grant application process, social media presence is noted using key indicators such as social media handles or numbers of followers on each platform. It is therefore preferrable for grassroots to have active social media accounts; this online presence for sociality purposes, in addition to an operational webpage, gives live updates on the charities' activities and local impact. Accordingly, social media and online presence enhances the activities of

community kitchens and establishes them as solid, real and trustworthy entities, along with established charities.

A word of caution with regards to online privacy threats and surveillance must be mentioned. World events such as the Twin Tower terrorist attack of September 11, 2001, as well as Iraq and Afghanistan wars have resulted in considerable privacy and surveillance policy changes. The USA Patriot Act 2001 simplified law enforcement agencies' access to online information deemed relevant to an on-going criminal information, whereas the EU's 2006 Data Retention Directive imposed the storage of phone calls and internet communication data by member states communication providers for a minimum of six months (Fuchs et al., 2011). These regulatory changes have allowed governments to increase their surveillance and arguably the activities of civil societies in their attempt to address injustices in the community, including food insecurity among the vulnerable. The distribution of a list of available charitable food providers might be met with criticism by the public and anti-poverty activists who have claimed that such a list enables the worsening of social security provision by local authorities who may see that "the problem is taken care of by the public" (Sadaka V, 2019).

If sharing detailed information about community initiatives that alleviate poverty might be unfavourably viewed by some members of the public who may not appreciate its usefulness, there is also the issue of visibility and decontextualization of information on social networks. Content might be published for a specific audience but given the open distribution of social media platforms such as Facebook, it is neither uncommon nor new that information 'tied to a particular context may migrate elsewhere' (Trottier, 2012). On platforms such at Twitter where any account, unless private, may follow another —Facebook still requires permission from the account holder to be accepted as a 'friend', although anyone may follow a 'page'— content is handled as public broadcast, and, accordingly, subject to appraisal by numerous institutions and individuals. For example, the same list I created to share information about service providers in the town of Reading was instrumentalised by an anonymous twitter profile as a testament to the long-standing failures of previous Conservative governments.

For all the privacy and surveillance issues inherent to digital activism, grassroots organisations as part of the TFN discussed in this study tend to limit their online presence mainly due limited resources such as money, volunteer labour, time, ICT infrastructure or influence. The privacy

of volunteers and service users' data is a sensitive topic for all kitchen leaders who implement in-house policies to mitigate risks, for instance through the use of data management software with restricted access in order to comply with the General Data Protection Regulation 2016/67, or with the explicit request of consent to photos being taken and uploaded to social media platforms. While grassroots food poverty organisations may suffer from lack of publicity, unlike larger civil society actors in the anti-poverty realm such as Crisis or the Big Issue, in many instances, less publicity is a fair price to pay in exchange for greater privacy. Scholarship has addressed the repercussions of social media use by highlighting the empowering potential of digital platforms but at the same time, it has warned against surveillance and privacy issues given that these platforms enable the exploitation of everyday sociality (Trottier, 2012). As technology evolves along with individual, institutional and corporate use of these technologies, the legal and policy frameworks governing social media presence of food grassroots might need to brough to the forefront to ensure leaders benefit from their charity's online presence and lessen adverse consequences.

6. Conclusions

This chapter focused on community kitchens that rely on ICT-enabled media to run their operations, on some of the ways they achieve this, and the implications of these practices. TFN food initiatives in this study make use of digital platforms to create new forms of food poverty activism in the form of the TFN through their connective 'internet-enhanced' action. The first part of the discussion explored how charity leaders adopt social media to communicate, fundraise and organise their activities. The second part discussed digital food activism as a catalyst for greater civic participation and food justice given that initiatives' online presence affects how the public conceptualises, experiences, and addresses food insecurity through volunteering or others forms of advocacy. The last part considered how digital platforms lead to community-building and secure the long-term survival of otherwise ephemeral groups within the Reading TFN. Building on the notion of 'virtual reconnection' within AFNs, as argued by Bos and Owen (2016), I find that online spaces have indeed altered social relations offline, and that they are not only supplementary but that they greatly enhance 'socio-material reconnections'. Therefore, initiatives not only benefit from digital activism, but they also reap the rewards of their virtual engagements in terms of running their

operations and ensuring their long-term survival in the ephemeral space of TFNs. In post-covid times marked by economic, political and social anxiety and deepening inequality, I argue that the presence of digital activism in the food movement can reshape foodscapes for the better by providing a critical social space for food activists, and for enabling change in favour of the UK's most vulnerable citizens. It follows that the online engagement of community kitchens plays an important role in efforts aimed at social justice and may even act as an impetus behind greater public interest in issues that affect economically marginalised individuals. Further research may consider whether encouraging a shift towards a 'citizen mindset' as argued in section 3.1 might prompt greater social change given that such a mindset is about tending to others' concerns and introducing opportunities for meaningful change in the food system. This shift may improve outcomes for individuals that are most affected by inequalities, such as those on low income or those who lack skills to cook wholesome meals.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, public health recommendations and mandatory measures meant that physical gatherings were impossible and social media was a substitute for in-person interactions. As daily communication and activities were increasingly mediated by screens, people's behaviour to social media changed and fatigue began to set in, according to an article in the online newspaper *Vox* (Molla, 2021). Not only did social media not present itself as a rewarding alternative to in-person interactions, but it became a toxic environment for some and a space of further polarisation. Social video platforms that enabled more authenticity and diversity such as TikTok saw important user growth during the pandemic, which suggests that social media users sought different forms of connection to those existing elsewhere on long-standing platforms. This quest for more reality, messiness and immediacy, along with connections with like-minded individuals via niche social media platforms referred to as 'social+' signalled a change in the ICT-enabled landscape. Social+ products are built around an integrated social experience by companies that are network and community driven across a wide range of product categories (Coolican, 2020). The growth of the concept of social+ implies that consumer technology reflects humans' essential need for connection and in turn, that these social+ products with their social components, such as public feed, comments sections and rating scales, are changing everyday online practices. While users might report experiencing social media fatigue, their unfaltering adoption of products with sociality potential points to the embeddedness of ICT-enabled media in contemporary societies, even if what is strictly termed 'social media' is also constantly evolving. And if, as

stated by Miller et al. (2016), predicting the future of social media platforms is a futile exercise, digital innovations will undoubtably continue to expand on users' quest for online sociality at various scales.

Given the rapid growth of technological advancements and rate at which newly commercialised technologies get adopted by users, the digital tools discussed in this chapter as well as their use will undoubtably evolve. In the preface of *Networked*, Rainie and Wellman (2014) noted that despite their awareness of some digital tools becoming obsolete shortly after the publication of their book, they could affirm with certainty that internet and mobile devices had not only reshaped an individual's social networks by broadening and diversifying them, but they had also altered people's relationship to these networks for the purpose of learning and connecting with each other. Consequently, the principles and reasons for the use of these social media platforms are expected to remain, and even amplify, more so in domains where additional connections translate into more connections among service providers and their volunteers, into greater justice for the disadvantaged and increased visibility for organisations.

A final caveat here concerns a point made by Manuel Castells in the preface to the second edition of his trilogy on the Information Age (Castells, 2010). Despite his explicit opposition to predictions, Castells (2010, p. xvii) nevertheless noted how global networks 'included some people and territories while excluding others, so inducing a geography of social, economic, and technological inequality'. In that sense, local initiatives such as community kitchens discussed in this chapter may not automatically benefit from access to more advanced tools in the running of their operations, but instead, find themselves on the other side of the digital divide unless they successfully recruit volunteers who are comfortable with the use of ICTs. Furthermore, grassroots activists and food organisations run the risk of aiming for an online presence similar to that of larger charities, which not only requires skilled volunteers and digital resources, but which may estrange charities from their service users who themselves largely lack digital skills. Further research might consist of quantitative explorations of the way in which social media is used by both contributors to community initiatives and their recipients. The default practice of posting on popular social media platforms such as Facebook or Instagram may prove outdated in the near future in light of innovations that compete with dominant social networking models, for example by targeting users with

privacy concerns and a preference for advertising-free platforms. Considering opposing narratives marked by a post-Covid love-hate relationship with digital media where social media fatigue among users occurs in parallel with innovations towards immersive internet experiences led by the tech giant Meta, the only certainty is that the virtual will continue to shape perceptions of the self and others, as well as what is deemed 'real'.

Chapter Five. In and part of the field: studying and practising food justice as a scholar-activist

1. Introduction

UK-wide levels of inequality and poverty have increased for many in the past decade. The latest figures in 2022 from the Family Resource Survey published by the Department for Work and Pensions point to 14.5 million people living in absolute low income after housing costs and 11.7 million living in relative low income before housing cost at the end of the financial year 2020. This amounts to 22% and 18% of the UK population respectively (GovUK, 2021). These levels of 'low income' refer to earnings of less than 60% of the UK's median income. These are similar trends to the previous year (i.e. 2019) with some groups more likely to be in poverty than others such as ethnic minorities, private renters or households with a disabled person (Francis-Devine, 2021a). Importantly for this chapter, findings from the additional food-related questions in the 2019/20 Family Resource Survey point to 5 million people living in food poverty which equates to 8% of the population (DWP, 2021a).

Food insecurity and food poverty are somewhat interchangeable terms, but the former is favoured in official documents such as the DWP's Family Resource Survey, where it refers to the inability to access or afford food, or to being forced to eat less or skip meals due to a lack of economic resources. The largest network of food banks in the UK, the Trussell Trust, has been reporting an average yearly increase of 10% in its parcel distribution, and sharper upward increases in the last five years by 81% since 2016/7, with demand up—due to Covid-related impacts on economic wellbeing—by 14% between April, 2021 to 2022 compared to the same period in 2019/20 (The Trussell Trust, 2022a). More recently, in 2022 the Food Foundation charity published a report that suggested that close to 9% of households or 4.7 million adults reported having experienced food insecurity in the past month, an increase on the previous year's figure of 7.3% (Food Foundation, 2022). The charity credits this increase to a rise in living costs such as energy and food prices—often referred to as the post-COVID 'cost of living crisis' in the UK (Hourston, 2022)—and the end of the weekly £20 uplift to Universal Credit that was in place during the worst of the pandemic. Despite challenges inherent to the quantification of food poverty, there is a consensus that it is worsening and deepening, especially since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic when more people had already started to rely on emergency

food providers (Goodwin, 2020; Loopstra, 2020). While the pandemic has adversely affected some people than others and exacerbated food poverty among certain groups of the population (Sustain, 2022b), it is accepted that food poverty is on the rise *in general* and a symptom of a wide range of already existing structural economic, social and health-related issues made much worse and 'deepened' by the pandemic and the post-pandemic cost of living crisis.

To address this ongoing sombre reality and take action, citizens across the UK have set up organisations and launched social movements that provide food to vulnerable people in the streets or in relatively stable premises. These emergency food providers—the expansion of which has not seen in the UK since World War II with 'communal feeding centres' (Atkins, 2011)—are described throughout this chapter as 'food aid providers', 'food charities' and 'community kitchens' that look to provide freshly cooked meals and other non-perishable foods and items to some of the most vulnerable and marginal members of the local community. As introduced and discussed in detail in Chapter Three and Four, I refer to these organisations as making up the Twilight Food Network (TFN) given their ephemeral nature and how they operate in the 'in between' spaces of the commodified food system (i.e. supermarkets) and the formalised food poverty system in the UK of foodbanks like the Trussell Trust. The exact number of those operating in the TFN is unknown, but figures collected by the Independent Food Aid Network estimates that 3,500 food aid providers run services in parallel with at least 1172 independent food banks and 1393 formalised Trussell Trust foodbanks that operate in the UK (IFAN, 2022).

This study began with the above observations, namely, the growing number of food charities making up the TFN and the increasing number of individuals who rely on this expanding network of charities for sustenance and access to 'free' food outside of the foodbank route of formal referral. To understand these changing conditions and how they impacted on people, I conducted research over a three-year period (2017-2020) in the town of Reading and its surrounding seeking to understand how charities were responding to this economic and food crisis and the resultant food poverty and inequality experienced by a growing number of individuals in urban centres. Various qualitative methods were used including ethnography, observation and interviews, and as I gradually became a key actor in one of the charities, I included more participatory methods, including volunteering and, later on, helping run one

food charity known as Sadaka. I sought to understand how ordinary people motivate, initiate and organise themselves to provide wholesome, cooked meals and non-perishable food and other items to vulnerable people on a regular basis through the TFN and its ephemeral, yet expanding, states of being. In doing this participatory research, I was engaged with and contributed to the TFN in Reading and experienced this more 'invisible', 'in-between' realm of food assistance first hand in towns and cities that operate at the margins of mainstream systems of food provisioning and food poverty reduction.

Yet as I continued to reflect on and conduct participatory research through volunteering and my engagements with the TFN through Sadaka as their social media lead, a key volunteer and the other leadership roles I took on during my research, my positionality began to shift to one of an 'activist' concerned with increasing food poverty in and around Reading and a desire to help support those organisations working to reduce food poverty and inequality. Given this, I shifted to become what other food scholars have called an 'activist-scholar' (Levkoe et al., 2020; Sandover, 2020) whereby I began to deploy and use more 'participatory action research' (PAR) methods designed to co-produce knowledge and research with TFN organisations, volunteers and service users. This chapter is a reflection of this process in my engagement with the TFN in and around Reading utilising self-reflection, autoethnography, participant observation and discussions with TFN leaders, volunteers and users. It builds directly on other PAR approaches from food studies—namely that coming from scholars working to promote greater food justice (Cadieux and Slocum, 2015; Kneafsey et al., 2017; Pine, 2017; Slocum and Cadieux, 2015)—and, thus contributes to these debates through an exploration of this kind of food research and work. The more unique contribution of this chapter is an exploration of what it meant for me to become a scholar-activist who 'does' and 'performs' this sort of research in the TFN that has emerged in and around the town of Reading. This exploration involves a discussion and analysis of the tensions that arose in using this approach to collect data but to also do the political work of reducing the immediate hunger of individuals at the same time I, and the organisations I worked with, attempt to confront the structural processes of food injustice, poverty and inequality.

This chapter continues as follows. First, I situate the chapter in debates on activist scholarship in general and that coming from food justice and scholar-activist research related to food and food poverty more specifically. I also briefly explore related ideas behind 'embodied' and/or

'visceral' research given the importance to this in my own work with TFNs in Reading. Much of this discussion is about the 'self' in the research process and then how the self as a scholar-activist must work in relation to others in order to conduct research and also be part of political projects like the TFN. Using the notion of 'hidden ethnography', I then explore my experiences of scholar activism, reflecting on my positionality, embodiment and my navigation of the tensions and complications of data collection in light of my desire to support individuals and the TFN charity of Sadaka in particular. In this, I explore the tensions and complications of scholar-activist work in the context of my particular case with TFNs and their—and my—desire to reduce immediate hunger and work for a more just food system. I conclude with a summary of the chapter and more on what this sort of approach to research and change holds for the attempts of the reduction of food poverty and inequality.

2. Setting the scholar-activist scene: debates, concepts and approaches in scholar activism, participatory and visceral geographical methods

2.1 Scholar activism and participatory approaches in food poverty research and beyond

Activist scholarship may be a relatively new concept but not as a praxis as noted by the sociologist Craig Calhoun (2008, p. xiii) in the preface to the edited manuscript on activist scholarship, published by the anthropologist Charles Hale (2008): '[a]ctivist scholarship is as old as Machiavelli and Marx or indeed Aristotle. The social sciences developed partly in and through activist scholarship'. Citing political economists of the nineteenth century as an example, Calhoun illustrates how thinkers, such as John Stuart for instance, did not only hold political views on mercantilism but actively acted upon them through campaigns against the Corn Laws. Hale's (2008) edited manuscript maps the practice of activist scholarship along its research process that is left 'fully open to contradiction, serendipity, and reflexive critique'. The food geographer Charles Levkoe and colleagues (2020) distinguish between the terms of 'scholar-activist' and 'activist-scholar' with hyphens, following Reynolds et al. (2018) for whom the difference between the terms highlights the positionalities of those involved in the research process. Both engage in scholarly activities, however, activist-scholars are committed to social change via their academic work whereas scholar-activists are predominantly change-makers engaged in research (Reynolds et al., 2018). Activist scholarship is equated with the term of 'activist research' (Couture, 2017, p. 145) which is also favoured by Cancian (1993). For the most part, 'activist scholarship' or 'scholar activist' with

or without a hyphen is the most common wording and is used in this chapter (Hale, 2001, 2008; Calhoun, 2008; Levkoe et al., 2020; Pulido, 2008; Sandover, 2020; Tilley and Taylor, 2014).

While intertwined, the words scholar and researcher carry similar yet nuanced meanings, but it is the scholar-activist notation that matters, 'whether real or perceived' (Reynolds, 2018, p. 990). In the food justice realm more generally, activists operate in the community to challenge the dominant system and propose alternatives. Scholars, academics or researchers support food justice efforts through relevant activities that typically involves publishing. For Reynolds (2018, p. 990), the dichotomy between activists and scholars is marked by the perceived superiority of academic expertise 'rather than [as] potentially complimentary to that based on lived experience', thus excluding activists from identifying as scholars. Yet, civic engagement in food justice is particularly helpful in food justice work and other community research, hence the valuable intersection of food justice activism and scholarship (Reynolds et al., 2018). For instance, food geographer Rebecca Sandover (2020) employed a scholar-activist approach to create collective knowledge and practices to address food injustices. Accordingly, participatory methods that include scholar activism have disruptive power by bridging the gap between scientific and popular knowledge; this enables academics to better comprehend and act upon the 'situated realities of complex issues facing communities' in order to address issues of food justice (Sandover, 2020, p.14).

Scholar activism employs a wide range of methods such as action research, participatory action research (PAR; more on this below), collaborative research and grounded theory (Hale, 2008) where the inclusion of and engagement with the 'studied' community is key. The practice of activist research provides an understanding of the causes of injustices and it is carried out with an organised collective of people to alter their conditions (Hale, 2001). Sociologist Francesca Cancian (1993, p.93) defines participatory research as 'a radical type of activist social research' that integrates scientific investigation with education and political action to challenge inequalities within the research process and in society. Within participatory research, the emphasis is on power relations and community groups, most notably underprivileged communities, rather than on policy experts and academia (Cancian, 1993). For Hale (2008, p.14) activist scholarship can constitute a proactive agenda for social change in the academic realm by acting 'against the unearned privilege embedded in

mainstream forms of knowledge production' through the question: 'research for whom'? Hale cites Laura Pulido for whom activist scholarship does not require that a choice be made between ethical-political commitments and scholarship when conducting research, but that such an endeavour presents particular challenges and requires acts of courage and fortitude (Pulido, 2008, p.362, cited in Hale, 2008, p.26).

Broadly then, activist scholars are compared to 'radical subjects' whose academic skills and positions serve a passion for transformative social change, thus striving for justice along their engagement with academic institutions (James and Gordon, 2008). Through the pursuit of critical knowledge and the combined efforts of scholarship and activism, researchers may work towards radical social change and a more 'socially just system, in communities and beyond' (Reynolds et al, 2018). In the words of Calhoun (2008, p. xxv):

> the world is in considerable need of improvement, and improvement comes in large part by means of social movements, struggles, and campaigns to change public agendas, not merely by the provision of technical expertise to those already in power. Activist scholarship can help movements have more success improving the world.

Thus, juxtaposing activism and scholarly work cannot be done independently of the political landscape (Levkoe et al, 2020), which confirms the value of aligning scholar activism with radical geography in an effort to advance food justice.

2.2 Approaches based on Participatory Action Research (PAR)

Feminist geographer Caitlin Cahill (2007, p.268) defines PAR as 'a collaborative approach in which those typically "studied" are involved as decision-makers and co-researchers in some or all stages of the research'. PAR emphasises the democratic aspect of conducting research because it consists of knowledge produced through collaboration and in action, by and for individuals within communities (Cahill, 2007, p.268). Since scholarship is accountable to the communities concerned by PAR, it has the potential to contribute towards social change and therefore challenge hegemonic relations of power and representations within social science research. Cahill (2007) cites Geraldine Pratt (2000) for whom PAR aims at changing reality and not merely describing it. For Rachel Pain (2004, p. 652), action-oriented research 'involves those conventionally "researched" in some or all stages of research, from problem definition through to dissemination and action'. Conducting and disseminating the research is done for and with participants, in tandem with the academic researcher to co-produce knowledge and

enact change for the researched (Pain, 2004). Similar to PAR, participatory research methods emphasise in-depth engagement with participants in order to produce research that is relevant and of use to the researched. While not strictly action-research, research that employs participatory methods aims to positively contribute to the activities of any given initiative by asking, for example, what kind of research might be useful to service leaders. A key difference, however, concerns who produces the research and, to a certain extent, who elicits the final research questions.

In her review of work concerned with making 'a difference to "real" people in the "real" world', that is, an 'engagement with individuals, groups and communities and action beyond the traditional research encounters', Pain (2003, p. 651) identifies renewed interest in action-oriented social geography since the 1990s, with scholars such as Michael Pacione (1999) or Rob Kitchin and Phil Hubbard (1999). Pain begins the first of three reviews on action-oriented research by citing Kitchin and Hubbard's (1999, p. 195, in Pain, 2003, p. 649) critique of geographical research: '[i]t seems that many social and cultural geographers are happy to survey (and 'map') the exclusionary landscape, but rarely do much to change that landscape'. Action-oriented social geography emphasises conducting research that is relevant to those concerned and that views communities and agencies as research peers. While social geography is not a new subtype of the discipline, it is nevertheless marked by a resurgence of interest as geographers seek to reveal, challenge injustices and search for solutions. Its practice can enable activism even though the latter might be omitted, 'or downplayed, reflecting researchers' modesty, perhaps, or the schism between the messy everyday practice and politics of research and the polished products which journals demand' (Pain, 2003, p.651). In that respect, geographer Paul Cloke (2002, p.602) highlights the growing need to appreciate 'new forms of selfless responsibility, freedom and resistance' that take 'the form of recognizable collective action, fuelled by ideological, charitable, spiritual or volunteering motives; or it may be smaller, more individual, more radical, including the resistances of [the studied]'. Human geography has the potential to address what is ordinarily invisible, silent and outside by becoming more moral, caring and politically aware through collective and individual action (Cloke, 2002). Taking action against social injustices, such as food insecurity, therefore lends itself to participatory methodology that seeks to do research with and for vulnerable individuals as both a research strategy and outcome of research (Pain, 2003).

In considering issues of positionality in fieldwork, geographer Sarah Moser (2008) identifies important connections between personality and the production of knowledge that are relevant to PAR. Moser (2008, p.389) exposes how personality—including interpersonal skills, emotional responses and mannerisms—affects a researcher's access to people in the field, and the degree to which participants may share their personal stories, and thus contribute to the collection of data:

> [i]t is reasonable to expect researchers, particularly those conducting intensely social fieldwork, to have an understanding of their emotional abilities and how their personalities affect the research process and outcomes.

Drawing on Moser (2008) geographer Catherine Wilkinson (2016) emphasises positionality beyond the key categorical frames of reference including class, gender, sexuality, race and age, to also include personality and appearance when conducting fieldwork. In particular, embellishments such as makeup, hair style and clothes are noteworthy signifiers of the personality of the researcher that affect participant observation (Wilkinson, 2016). For scholars in the field, such reflexivity does not stand for 'further navel gazing' but rather, a more thorough evaluation of aspects of the self that are relevant to the research context and knowledge production (Moser, 2008). Cloke et al. (2000, p. 151) highlight the value of reflexivity in ethnographic approaches to research on homelessness, citing the possibilities for more ethical and moral paths:

> [I]f we really seek to avoid research as tourism and colonialism—if we are serious about 'giving something back'—then a more sustained and committed ownership of research as process, practice and product seems to be required, especially in researching marginalised others.

An emphasis on reflexivity enables researchers to negotiate ethical tensions that inevitably occur in research with vulnerable individuals where sensitivity to gender, culture and other personal characteristics 'make us much more aware of asymmetry and exploitation' and therefore, help produce research that gives back to the researched (Cloke et al., 2000, p.151).

Sociologist Shane Blackman (2007) presents similar arguments to Moser's (2003) with regards to the disclosure of emotions in ethnographic research. For fear of 'losing legitimacy or being discredited', researchers may reluctantly give a realistic account of their emotions in fieldwork and refrain from referring to their 'hidden ethnography', which concerns 'empirical

data that is not released because it may be considered too controversial' (Blackman, 2007, p.700). Oppositions to the notion of objectivist social research in the past few decades has meant that scholars no longer aim for strict neutrality by ignoring the role of individuality in the research process (Moser, 2008), however, such considerations to the research practice presents both opportunities as well as challenges. For instance, Blackman (2007, p.702) refers to his hidden ethnography when he writes about activities not directly aimed at data collection, but rather, at building trust with his study participants. The usefulness of these encounters for knowledge production notwithstanding, emotional investment in the lives of the research participants comes with ethical dilemmas that demand careful consideration.

2.3 Facing the difficulties inherent to participatory methods: accessing and contributing to the lives of the 'vulnerable'

In the UK, the Care Act 2014 (Legislation.gov, 2014) is at the core of charities' interactions with vulnerable adults. This important piece of legislation sets out statutory responsibility for the integration of care and support between national health and local social services to ensure the wellbeing of those who need care and support. According to section 42(1) of the Care Act 2014, local authorities have a duty to enquire, and act should they suspect that an adult 'has needs for care and support', 'is experiencing, or is at risk of, abuse or neglect' and 'as a result of those needs is unable to protect himself or herself against the abuse or neglect or the risk of it'. To ensure the safeguarding of adults deemed at risk of abuse or neglect, trained volunteers are expected to raise concern should they feel that something they have seen, heard or purposedly told is of concern. Throughout the legislative text, 'adults at risk of abuse or neglect' are also termed 'patients', 'service users' or 'vulnerable individuals'. Another important policy for charities is the Mental Capacity Act 2005, a legal framework that protects people who may lack capacity to make decisions for themselves. The role of this policy is also one of safeguarding, that is, protecting people who may be 'in vulnerable circumstances', as in 'at risk of abuse or neglect due to the actions (or lack of action) of another person' (OPG, 2015, p.4).

However, the same document identifies issues with the concept of 'vulnerable adult', because it may incorrectly suggest victims of abuse are responsible for some of the harm to which they are subject. Government guidance therefore favours the phrase adults at risk of abuse and neglect of various kinds: physical, financial, verbal of psychological, as a consequence of an

act or, conversely, a failure to act (OPG, 2015, p. 5). Policy clearly stipulates that public agencies have a duty of care towards individuals deemed at risk and sets out approaches to do so. When it comes to charitable endeavours, especially when informal groups are concerned, the situation is not as straightforward because whilst signposting might be encouraged, volunteers often lack training to recognise signs of abuse or neglect; furthermore, they may have neither time nor up-to-date information to address any harm they perceive. Additionally, volunteers who are trained to implement safeguarding principles may struggle to implement the 'care, not carry' adage previously mentioned because volunteers are not social workers therefore limited in their knowledge and ability to act upon issues when serving food to vulnerable adults.

In that respect, for von Benzon and van Blerk (2017, p. 898), 'the notion of vulnerability reflects a socially constructed perception, and sometimes a reality, of a lack of social, political and economic capital held by such groups when compared to the societal norm'. Individuals deemed vulnerable are a heterogenous group that may present a wide range of issues, some more visible than others since the umbrella term of vulnerability includes marginalised, excluded and other minority populations that are considered in social, political and economic terms as vulnerable. People who experience homelessness, addictions, abuse and neglect, for instance, are commonly alleged 'to have reduced social and economic capital, which is seen to impede their capacity to act independently' (von Benzon and van Blerk, 2017, p. 898). This perceived lack of independence leads to a reliance on other individuals and groups, and in time, vulnerable individuals face decreased social capital as they gradually lose control over various socio-economic factors in their own lives when it comes to accommodation, work, education or places to eat, for example.

PAR methodologies are especially useful to overcome obstacles when doing research with vulnerable participants. Issues, however, include research governance, ethical concerns, interpretation and representation (Aldridge, 2012). There is a certain distrust of less-conventional, participatory approaches such as PAR by policy makers who prefer evidence-based research, yet these methods are useful and needed when working with vulnerable research participants regardless of the field or discipline (Walker et al., 2008: 164). Participant empowerment is not only a desirable but a necessary component of the research process to help tackle the ethical challenges of engaging with populations deemed vulnerable (von

Benzon and van Blerk, 2017; Williams, 2016). This can be done safely for all involved by making sure that people perceived as vulnerable are given the opportunity to participate and provide informed consent in research projects. On that note, Punch (2012, p. 90) argues that fieldwork pressures can result in anxiety for the researcher who strives to interact correctly with all participants, maintaining a professional researcher identity and do as much as possible to collect enough data:

> Such ethical concerns can mean that, as researchers, we are hard on ourselves in the field and may not always recognise the immense academic, emotional and practical pressures we put ourselves under in order to generate data. Since researchers usually do not talk openly about the moments of feeling lost and the lulls in motivation, we may assume that these feelings only apply to us as we strive to live up to the mythical, competent researcher.

Von Benzon and van Blerk (2017) highlight a paradox when it comes to protecting the researched, which, in my view, adds to researchers' anxiety prior to and during the fieldwork. Institutions and individuals act as gatekeepers to marginalised people, which prevents them from contributing to the research agenda. In turn, this poor engagement limits their potential for a direct or indirect influence on academic, and subsequently socio-political, understanding of their lived experience. Again, for von Benzon and van Blerk (2017, p.900) this situation is incompatible with approaches within critical geography that aim for the inclusion an argument for the necessity for marginalised people to be supported in decision-making about their own lives, rather than to have decisions made for them by others. The perpetual surveillance, monitoring and record keeping in today's panoptic society too often results in the excessive protection of marginalised people in an effort to implement duty of care. How do we expose the hardship endured by vulnerable individuals if we cannot access them? Therefore, PAR and participatory research methods represent a practical alternative to the exclusionary domains of typical academic research and it is an approach particularly suited to 'social researchers working as an activist' following Fuller and Kitchin (2004), Pain (2004), Pratt & Kirby (2003) and others (Cahill, 2007). Participatory-based research methods are seen as a means to enact social change and while Cahill (2007) found its ability to act as a catalyst for personal change less understood at the time of her writing, she nonetheless acknowledged it as having the potential to create new possibilities of being in the world.

This potential for new forms of subjectivity comes with dilemmas for researchers who are faced with competing demands and expectations in the field. During his residential

ethnography inside a faith-based therapeutic community working in the area of addiction and rehabilitation, the geographer Andrew Williams explored the complex ethical and practical dilemmas inherent to identity management, access and consent, and the dilemma of 'mixed loyalties' (Williams, 2016). Williams relates how, as a participant-researcher, he was confronted to values and practices that clashed with his own personal ethics. Researchers aim for relational research encounters with participants, but at the same time must abide by university ethics board requirements. These tensions are common in participatory studies with vulnerable groups which call for more inclusive, adaptive and qualitative methodological approaches (Aldridge, 2012). Researchers might want to interact more gradually with participants may not do so due to time and resource constraints. This is problematic because vulnerable participants, such those who are homeless or on very low income may be difficult to approach and interview. Interacting with them might also expose researchers to difficult or uncomfortable encounters such as fights among service users in a community kitchen, accounts of destitution following an eviction or drunken behaviour that leads to a ban from a food handout. Emotions of the researchers are important considerations in the research process (von Benzon and van Blerk, 2017), as highlighted by Samantha Punch (2012, p. 86) who notes that 'guilt, apprehension, fears and worries are legitimate, common and even useful experiences of fieldwork'. A potential engagement with these structural, ethical and personal issues lies in 'body-focused' activist research which is discussed in the next section.

2.4 Participatory methods and visceral geographic research

> When we do geography, we always do it for something – to comment on and assist with social change, to advert environmental damage, to articulate political process, to shift, aid, begin, enhance, insist, speak up, speak out, transform or revolutionalize. […] [The] visceral realm can help us to understand and facilitate such geographic 'doing' throughout many different focal areas. Where next might geographers implement a visceral approach? Climate change research? Remote sensing? Perhaps, the answer is, whenever we are moved (Hayes-Conroy and Hayes-Conroy, 2010, p. 1280).

Body-centred scholarship—and the often accompanying autoethnographies related to participatory research methods that go along with a body-centred approach—work to better understand the visceral realm, including geographies of affect and emotion as well as non-representational ways we engage with the world, as shown in the quote above (Hayes-Conroy and Hayes-Conroy, 2010). The interaction of the self and other is particularly noteworthy in this study and so are aspects of the visceral, such as one's elemental emotions, instincts and

non-intellectual bodily judgements. Among researchers, an inclination for progressive social change renders the use of body-centred scholarship useful because it may lead to effective political strategies. Building on a description of the visceral as 'the sensations, moods, and ways of being that emerge from our sensory engagement with the material and discursive environments in which we live in' (Longhurst et al., 2009, p.334), Hayes-Conroy and Hayes Conroy associate visceral geographies with a broad and dynamic approach in geographical scholarship. The term refers to a partial dismissal of dualisms by prompting a rethink and reconceptualization of boundaries between the mind and the body, what is felt and what is known or thought. In that respect, non-representational theoretical (NRT) perspectives are valuable to research approaches that emphasise the non-cognitive facets of everyday life. NRT further emphasises the variability of what is experienced: 'there is no stable "human" experience because the human sensorium is constantly being re-invented as the body continually adds parts into itself' (Thrift, 2008, p.5). The visceral concerns blurred boundaries and a questioning of dualisms such as nature-nurture or mind-body that come from a history of feminists, geographers and environmentalists eager to redefine the borders of nature and culture. These blurred boundaries help reshape the body's relationality to the social and material world and, according to Hayes-Conroy and Hayes-Conroy (2010, p. 1279), they carry a political message in two ways. The first is that individual bodily sensations and judgments are social and political, as in, people's ability to relate to others and situations depends on a myriad of things, for example past experiences, appearance, or occupation.

The second way these blurred boundaries carry political meaning concerns the ways in which a human body's material agency, for example skin colour, can counter existing social patterns and lead to their disruptions as shown by Hayes-Conroy and Hayes-Conroy whose research shows that unequal economic and geographical access to food can affect and reinforce people's visceral reactions to food and subsequent food choices. Hayes-Conroy and Hayes-Conroy (2010, p. 1279) emphasise the potential of new interactions with food to 'encourage the development of new habits that may disrupt unhealthy patterns of eating and empower disenfranchised groups', thus showing that everyday embodied practices and affective relationships are processes that impact and are impacted by broader political economic forces.

The embodied aspect of everyday interactions with people and space is found in Alan Latham's (2003, p. 1994) research on everyday urban public culture 'as embodied practice that is creative, pregnant with possibilities, but nonetheless located within particular networks of power/knowledge'. Specifically, Latham (2003) is in favour of more methodological experimentation and pluralism within human geography, which would enable research to take into account noncognitive and nonverbal facets of the qualitative research process (Latham, 2003). For Latham (2003, p. 2005), knowledge is both 'partial' and 'situated' when conducting interviews because these only provide incomplete accounts of an event, place, or individual. Conceptualising interviews and empirical material as a kind of performance enables the researcher to consider details 'in the sense of a fuller and more variegated picture of the interviewee' rather than a single unified truth emanating from the interviewee. New methodological horizons within human geography are possible thanks to the metaphor of performance to describe methods that are respectful to people involved in the making, truthful, rigorous and emotionally attuned to the people involved in the research process. On a similar note, Hayes-Conroy (2013, 88) warns against aiming for clear cut classifications when analysing observations of material life and participants' accounts. This is because it is unwise to assume that research participants 'readily articulate or reflect on their own life practices through such political and cognitive means' (Hayes-Conroy and Hayes-Conroy, 2013, p.88). To further include the researched and the messiness of the research process, participatory and other action-orientated research methods have gained popularity in recent years. Radical social geography in particular has been marked by research that seeks to reveal and challenge various injustices (Pain, 2003) and research that is more moral, caring and politically aware (Cloke, 2003).

3. Being a scholar-activist in the Reading TFN: subjectivities, the visceral and the tensions of using participatory methods in food research

3.1 Positionality when conducting research in the TFNs

How prepared are research students for fieldwork? An analogy with the performing arts might be found with the example of dancers who follow a rigorous training regime from an early age, undergo graded evaluations to document progress and understudy numerous roles before they are chosen to take central stage. Social researchers do not receive similar preparation before they 'enter' the field. They might be given an overview on methodology

as part of compulsory research methods courses, or a more in-depth description of specific research methods over a semester but they benefit from little to no 'practice' before their entrance on the stage of their chosen fieldwork. They must find ways to contact, interact with their research participants and understand the unwritten codes of conduct in any given field in order to gain their trust and respectfully collect data in a short amount of time to meet deadlines. While academic support might be available, ethnography demands personal engagement and presents distinctive challenges. Figure 16 below is a photo collage of pictures of me taken at different TFN initiatives during which I volunteered and led sessions. I was particularly proud to have built good rapport with service users who agreed to having their pictures taken and shared.

Figure 16. PAR in the field as a scholar-activist with volunteers and service users.

Accessing the field was not an issue because I am comfortable interacting with people from any socio-economic background. The challenge, however, concerned conducting research with individuals with whom I had been interacting for some time prior to the start of the research. At what point did I tell them I was 'studying' them or, at the very least, that I was exploring the circumstances that had led them to rely on food charities? Initially, the research questions pertained to ways in which community groups organise themselves to alleviate food poverty. My initial written and verbal requests for interviews were met with silence or refusal perhaps due to time constraints, distrust or fear of criticism. I then reflected on my personality: while it was useful to be open-minded and an extrovert, my tendency to over-think and my fear of being perceived as 'an intruder' despite my experience in community initiatives were less helpful. Moser's (2018) reflections above on how aspects of her personality affected access to participants in her own fieldwork and the resultant production of knowledge is relevant here. For me, interacting with volunteers and vulnerable individuals in the TFN entails considerations with regards to religion, nationality, class and educational background, as exemplified by the numerous comments made about my accent, appearance and demeanour. At faith-based organisations in particular, questions that pertained to my religious identity were common given my lack of religious expression as exemplified by a service user who asked me why I did not wear a hijab like all the other volunteers at the charity Sadaka or by another service user who wanted to discuss my views on the Scriptures after a charity leader at the Way Ministry had read a text from the New Testament. For Moser (2018), the researcher's personality is crucial in shaping power relations in encounters with research subjects who themselves interact according to their own social skills and emotional abilities.

Emotions play an important role in what Blackman (2007) refers to as the 'hidden ethnography', which concerns empirical data aimed at building trust with participants but not directly directed at collecting data. Similar to Blackman's experience, I have spent time with vulnerable people with whom I have built good rapport over the years, and I attribute their trust to my availability in times of need but also on an everyday, 'ordinary' basis. Part of my hidden ethnography, then, includes time spent conversing with service users in the street prior to the start of food services, or at other venues such as supermarkets, public park or emergency department following an incident. These moments played crucial roles in my research and the development of knowledge production but revealing and using them as 'data' might raise methodological and ethical issues. Criticism might pertain, for instance, to

the rigour of data collection and to informed consent not repeatedly being overtly given (Holland, 2007). Further, displaying empathy when socialising with research participants might be perceived as a ruse to exploit participants in order to gain source material (Cotterill, 1992).

Following Wilkinson (2016), to navigate the tensions in my research project in the TFN as a scholar activist, further considerations of my positionality, such as my appearance is important. Specifically, depending on the context, the researcher's choice of makeup, hair style and clothes may affect interactions during participant observation, which was certainly the case in my own fieldwork. To volunteer at community kitchens, I initially dressed casually, making sure I presented well overall; this changed as the months went by as I purposely wore plainer clothes, avoided makeup or jewellery and sought to attract as little attention as possible. My efforts aimed at mirroring the appearance of service users was not a conscious decision but one that was made as I spent more and more time helping at sessions, sitting with service users and hearing their stories. When most barely had access to shelter and hygiene facilities, it felt inappropriate to display signifiers of my relatively privileged social standing, and furthermore, given that the majority of users were men, I chose to downplay any femininity but more generally my 'young, white and non-British' identity, as remarked by service users who were attentive to the appearance and behaviour of volunteers. This may seem like an attempt at imitating the physical appearance of the researched to achieve their acceptance for the sole purpose of collecting data, and while this was not my intention, it felt it was imperative that I develop mutual trust by considering my positionality in relation to people who were undergoing hardship. As a kitchen volunteer, providing a service to vulnerable individuals, I had received safeguarding training where participants were encouraged to keep a 'healthy distance' between themselves and users, and to 'care for them but not carry their burden' (Sadaka KL, 2019)[22]. Instructions included monitoring our language, refraining from giving personal information especially contact details and refusing personal gifts. As I progressively became more experienced in interacting with service users, and a regular session leader, I assisted with ensuring safeguarding for all involved, for instance by responding to a comment made by a service user on a volunteer's hijab or suggesting that

[22] To ensure confidentiality, participants' accounts are identified as with previous chapters: the name of the TFN initiative followed by 'SU' for Service User, 'KL' for kitchen leader or 'V' for Volunteer and year of data collection e.g., Sadaka V, 2019. Direct speech is also reported using double quotation marks.

a volunteer wear more appropriate clothes during the summer months to prevent inappropriate remarks.

When interacting with young people, geographer Michael Leyshon (2002) noted the difficulty inherent to overcoming social distance with participants who remained 'others' along a continuum during the research process. Similarly, my degree of 'otherness' to the service users was relative and depended on 'cultural, gender, race and age differences as well as the level of commitment into the project by the researcher and their relative level of acceptability amongst the [users] themselves' (Leyshon, 2002, p.181). One way to try to circumvent this complex aspect of any social research fieldwork where vulnerable individuals are involved might be to act covertly, which could, however, result in serious ethical concerns. In the preface to his book *Sans Domicile Fixe*, the journalist Hubert Prolongeau explains why he thought it necessary to conduct covert ethnography among the homeless of Paris in the winter of 1992-1993 by pretending to be homeless himself (Prolongeau, 2016). He claimed that impersonating a rough sleeper, rather than revealing his real identity, allowed the collection of richer data and the publication of a book that relates the raw, everyday reality of living in the streets.

Considering all the above, researchers might prefer to keep their hidden ethnography to themselves seeing that revealing such controversial aspects of the field could be deemed unethical. Blackman (2007, p. 712) warns that '[r]eflexive accounts [...] can bring problems based around researcher intrusion as a result of exchange, identification, collusion and advocacy'. Overthinking how we approach participants and excessively worrying over ethical practice can indeed disturb relationships on the field, and lead to poor data collection. An example of this is when I initially set out to schedule face-to-face interviews with a couple of service users at a community kitchen. The two interviewees were overall very talkative and had given me verbal consent to use their accounts for my research. Yet, when we finally sat down to conduct the formal interviews, both interviewees only very briefly responded to questions and showed signs of discomfort. It appeared that the formal setting with my voice recorder had been uncomfortable for them, and furthermore, it had encouraged them to provide 'useful' rather than spontaneous, truthful answers to my questions.

In conducting research—hidden or otherwise—emotions have an epistemological significance given that it is through them, along with cognition and intellect that we understand the world (Holland, 2007). For that, researchers may not wish to reveal personal and emotional investments in their fieldwork as these vary according to the researcher's interest in the project and other considerations such as 'their gender and stage in the life course, the research topic, sensitivity of the research questions, vulnerability of the researched and the fieldwork location' (Punch, 2012, p.92). Immersing the self is an intense experience when entering other people's worlds (Punch, 2012) and this is particularly the case when researching vulnerable individuals and food poverty more generally. Paradoxically, it might leave researchers vulnerable and exposed in the process, which partly explains why revealing emotions in not commonplace in academic writing. Punch (2012) points to moral disapproval from academic peers, as well as the mechanisms researchers use to protect the lives of the researched, which can curb motivation. However, opening up and revealing emotions in the field can provide researchers with greater understanding of the research context, and it can improve links with individuals whose situation is the theme of the research project. 'Realistic' or candid accounts of fieldwork help researchers consider their positionality in the research process and they may lead to richer data collection, as well as enduring relationships among the researched and other partners.

3.2 Scholar activism: Deploying the visceral in TFNs to enact food justice

3.2.1 Visceral methodologies and newer alternatives within TFNs

The previous section discussed aspects of the self that do not tend to feature in PAR methodological accounts. Body-centred scholarship emphasises how aspects of the visceral such as non-verbal communication, moods or feelings can help make sense of relationships and other sensory engagements during the research process. Following Longhurst (2009) 'a visceral approach is another way of thinking through the body' that is particularly useful when considering everyday practices such as eating. In the same way that tending to the visceral can inform geography and migration studies about the formation of political subjectivities via bodily processes for Longhurst (2009), such an approach can contribute to a better understanding of interactions within food and poverty research. It is because eating is intimately linked with individuals' subjectivities that providing food constitutes an activity

where ideas about bodies, power, difference and identity intersect (Hayes-Conroy and Hayes-Conroy, 2013; Probyn, 2000).

Similar to Longhurst's (2009) exploration of migrant women's experience of consuming food at home, I sought to make sense of the act of providing food to those who cannot access it and are deemed vulnerable. For Goodman (2011, p. 250) and following Probyn (2000), the viscerality of food concerns connections to the emotional, 'the inexpressible, and the biological and how these are all inseparable and entangled in complex, complementary and ambiguous ways'. Food served at TFN sessions is not 'just' calories but much more in the sense that it is 'a part of our daily routines and engagements with others' and not to be taken for granted in instances when food is scarce (Goodman, 2011). Volunteers act as gatekeepers to food at sessions where service users must queue to receive the food that is handed to them; while TFN initiatives in this study emphasise choice by providing a variety of cooked meals, fresh produce and long-life food, service users must nevertheless attend handouts at specific times and accept the food that is available on any given day. To ensure food is suitable and enjoyed by a large number of service users, all Reading TFN initiatives offer vegetarian options, for instance, and respect other preferences or dietary restrictions that include egg, gluten, or diary free meals. Allergens are clearly identified, and service users do not need to take food they do not like, which is appreciated because of the undeniable sensory appeal of food which is not only nourishment and sustenance but a source of conviviality, and as argued by Dowler et al. (2010), a cultural and an identity marker. Figure 17 below illustrates the type of food served at the kitchen Sadaka where cooks are for the most part volunteers who have acquired food safety and hygiene qualifications via the charity or their place of work.

Figure 17. Food served at Sadaka: vegetarian and meat-based meal, fresh fruits and homemade desserts.

Furthermore, the methodological process that encourages researchers to consider the visceral realm helps reveal, as argued by Hayes-Conroy and Hayes-Conroy (2008, p. 469), ways in which people can be enthused into individual or grouped socio-political organising. Volunteers who allocate time, energy and resources into TFN initiatives must acknowledge emotions that range from enjoyment to apprehension and even disgust when receivers of food aid may exhibit unpleasant features such as poor personal hygiene or aggressiveness on the part of users. Doing 'visceral politics' (Hayes-Conroy and Hayes-Conroy, 2008) entails making sense of the realities of being on the field and the resultant interpersonal relationships, some of which can be awkward and uncomfortable. As I experienced during sessions, it was not uncommon for volunteers to opt for tasks that demand little contact with service users, for instance, such as preparing food or standing behind a counter so as to keep a comfortable distance with those they serve. In hot weather in particular, volunteers complained of the smells in crowded premises, where cooked food, heat and bodily odours render the food service exceptionally challenging for some. Conversely, while long term volunteers such as myself and session leaders take note of the viscerality of providing food to a heterogenous community, sounds, smells and other sensory information have little impact on long term engagement. When welcoming new volunteers, Sadaka talks about safeguarding and bodily sensations because leaders have noticed discomfort with regards to interactions between some volunteers and service users, as well as with the food served. As a volunteer lead for Sadaka, I explicitly initiated conversations with new volunteers to gauge

their responses to their first shift by asking questions such as 'how was the drinks service, did you speak to anyone'? 'What did you particularly enjoy on the day, was there any incident that you would like to talk about'? Questions were always open-ended and as precise as possible, especially when I was present at sessions and noted an incident such as comments made to a volunteer who might respond unfavourably or stop volunteering. In instances where individuals decide to cease volunteering, I always seek to know the reasons in order to make sure volunteers are not deterred from engaging in community initiatives due to feelings of unease.

Overall findings from my own engagement with TFNs and volunteers have shown that the visceral realm has important 'catalytic potential' as posited by Hayes-Conroy and Hayes-Conroy (2008, p. 461) because it enables the rethinking of seemingly mundane act of providing food as a means to 'inspire action across difference'. In addition, through tending to the affective relations surrounding my TFN volunteering, TFN initiatives are spaces of care that provide more than food to service users as exemplified by the following comment (Sadaka SU, 2018):

> "You are not like us but you get us, not like these big charities, all they care about is the money they get from the council when they help us. They give you something, but it's never free. You, and the other folks get nothing, but you save lives"

Following what Dowler et al. (2010, p. 216) call 'care as action', volunteers are involved in the needs of 'others' by responding to 'disconnection' in the food system. The process of 'reconnection' entails forming alliances between food, people, the environment, and, arguably, taking care of, and responsibility for 'others' (Dowler et al., 2010, p.212). Arguably, employing an ethic of care framework enables researchers to consider the visceral in relationships between individuals, such as between consumers, food, producers and the environment. Emotions such as love, joy and guilt hold radical potential, and, applied to a practice of reconnection, an ethic of care approach can contribute to a reconfiguration of people's relations to food at the community level (e.g. Kneafsey et al., 2008) and lead to more equitable relationships not only between producers and consumers, but also between eaters more generally and their source of sustenance. Goodman's (2011, p. 252) notion of 'newer "alternatives"' can be applied here whereby food injustices are addressed by informally public-led initiatives such as the TFNs in this study. Furthermore, the 'radical and

transformatory potential' of reconnection through an ethic of care is found in TFN initiatives where the boundaries between those who give and receive help are blurred, as shown by the exchange below between me and a volunteer who was also a service user, and whose personal situation was difficult:

> Me: "Why do you volunteer when you clearly have so much on your plate?"
> Service user: "I know what they say, you can't pour from an empty cup, but looking at people, harmless souls on the periphery of society, I just can't help it, I want to help, it's in my nature" (New Beginnings SU, 2020).

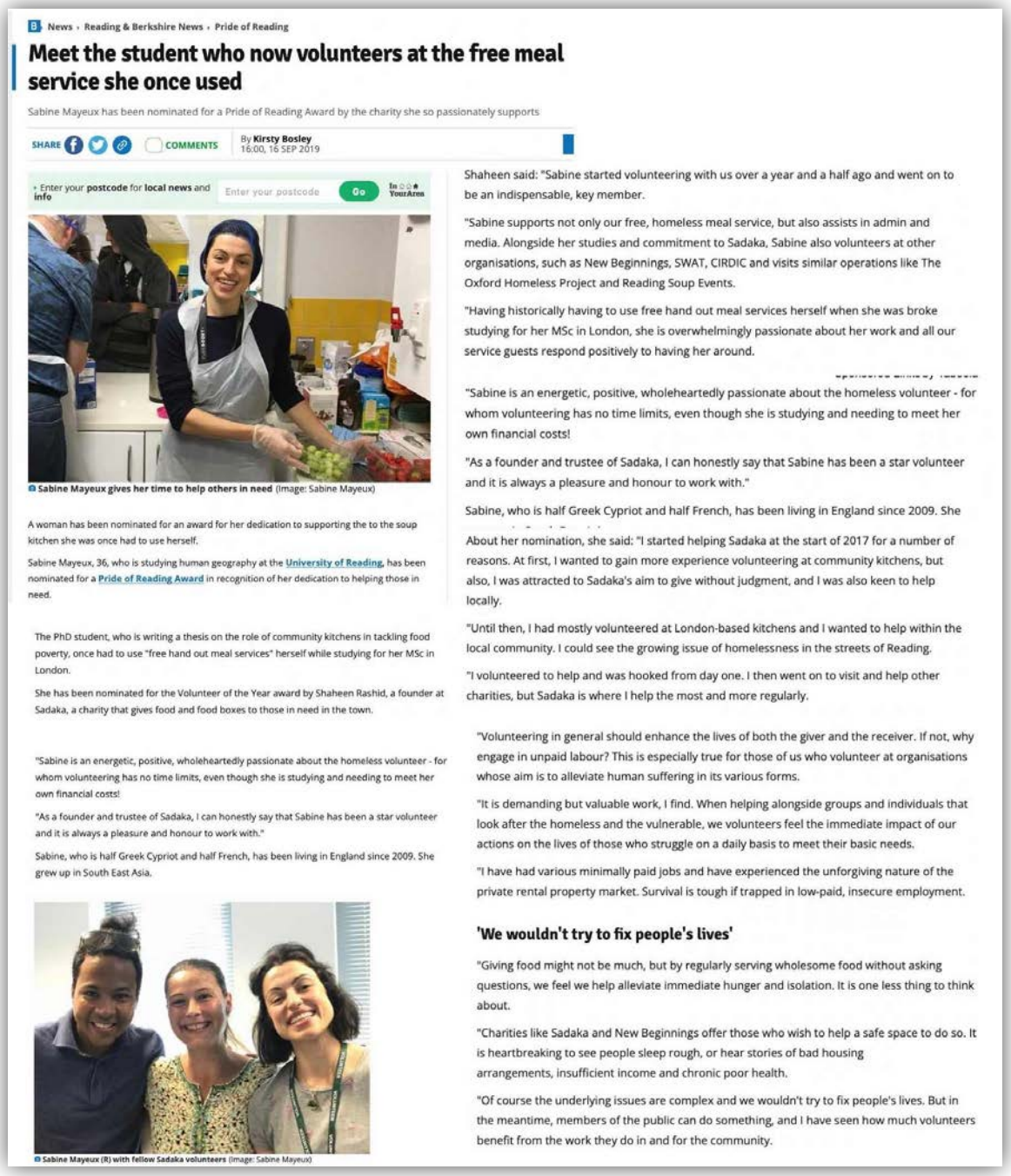
Findings suggest that TFN initiatives attract individuals who feel the need to care for others, not out of duty but because they sense an urge to act upon what they deem unjust. Capturing what prompts 'reconnection' among people and food based on the notion of 'care' is valuable because it prompts greater understanding of what influences people to get involved in any endeavour (Kneafsey et al., 2008, p. 41). In addition, such considerations can help situate engagements within greater efforts for greater food justice as they illustrate how knowledge and practices are shared for wider transformational change.

3.2.2 Scholar activism for greater food justice

In the quest for greater reconnection within communities between food and people, charity-led initiatives are presented as potential catalysts for capacity building for food justice (Kneafsey et al., 2017). To study ways in which food justice is 'practiced', Kneafsey et al. (2017, p. 631) refer to Cadieux and Slocum (2015, p.1) for whom increased accountability is necessary in food activism, or in their words, 'socially just research and action'. Accordingly, while participatory methodologies may give rise to lasting and valuable relationships between researchers and communities, engaging with initiatives demands time and financial resources, both of which are marked by their scarcity. My study of TFNs suggests that scholar activism can bridge a gap between research and food activism provided this is done in 'a culturally appropriate form in the UK, sensitive to ways in which inequalities are generated, sustained, reproduced and reinforced in British society' (Kneafsey et al., 2017, p. 631).

In the context of community kitchens, I—as a scholar-activist—experienced tensions between competing interests such as those of the academy, vulnerable participants, kitchen leaders and personal interests. An appreciation of the visceral in the research process enables researchers to acknowledge these competing interests because, as argued by Pulido (2008,

p.363), '[l]iving the life of the scholar activist not only helps to change the world but also provides an avenue to change yourself'. Figure 18 on the next page illustrates this point: following my nomination by a kitchen leader of the charity Sadaka for the 'Pride of Reading Award', I was interviewed by a journalist of the local newspaper *Get Reading* whose article emphasised a recollection regarding my discovery of community kitchens. A novice with media dealings, I briefly exposed a personal story that overrode any other motivation for my engagement against food poverty and anything else I said during the over-the-phone interview. The article overstated my own insecurity, which felt dishonest considering service users' real and multiple insecurities. My subsequent interactions with journalists changed after the publication of this article as I carefully considered my 'story', making sure I emphasised what I wanted them to report on, rather than write an article with a 'clickbait' strategy.



News › Reading & Berkshire News › Pride of Reading

Meet the student who now volunteers at the free meal service she once used

Sabine Mayeux has been nominated for a Pride of Reading Award by the charity she so passionately supports

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Sabine Mayeux gives her time to help others in need (Image: Sabine Mayeux)

A woman has been nominated for an award for her dedication to supporting the to the soup kitchen she was once had to use herself.

Sabine Mayeux, 36, who is studying human geography at the University of Reading, has been nominated for a Pride of Reading Award in recognition of her dedication to helping those in need.

The PhD student, who is writing a thesis on the role of community kitchens in tackling food poverty, once had to use "free hand out meal services" herself while studying for her MSc in London.

She has been nominated for the Volunteer of the Year award by Shaheen Rashid, a founder at Sadaka, a charity that gives food and food boxes to those in need in the town.

"Sabine is an energetic, positive, wholeheartedly passionate about the homeless volunteer - for whom volunteering has no time limits, even though she is studying and needing to meet her own financial costs!

"As a founder and trustee of Sadaka, I can honestly say that Sabine has been a star volunteer and it is always a pleasure and honour to work with."

Sabine, who is half Greek Cypriot and half French, has been living in England since 2009. She grew up in South East Asia.

Sabine Mayeux (R) with fellow Sadaka volunteers (Image: Sabine Mayeux)

Shaheen said: "Sabine started volunteering with us over a year and a half ago and went on to be an indispensable, key member.

"Sabine supports not only our free, homeless meal service, but also assists in admin and media. Alongside her studies and commitment to Sadaka, Sabine also volunteers at other organisations, such as New Beginnings, SWAT, CIRDIC and visits similar operations like The Oxford Homeless Project and Reading Soup Events.

"Having historically having to use free hand out meal services herself when she was broke studying for her MSc in London, she is overwhelmingly passionate about her work and all our service guests respond positively to having her around.

"Sabine is an energetic, positive, wholeheartedly passionate about the homeless volunteer - for whom volunteering has no time limits, even though she is studying and needing to meet her own financial costs!

"As a founder and trustee of Sadaka, I can honestly say that Sabine has been a star volunteer and it is always a pleasure and honour to work with."

Sabine, who is half Greek Cypriot and half French, has been living in England since 2009. She

About her nomination, she said: "I started helping Sadaka at the start of 2017 for a number of reasons. At first, I wanted to gain more experience volunteering at community kitchens, but also, I was attracted to Sadaka's aim to give without judgment, and I was also keen to help locally.

"Until then, I had mostly volunteered at London-based kitchens and I wanted to help within the local community. I could see the growing issue of homelessness in the streets of Reading.

"I volunteered to help and was hooked from day one. I then went on to visit and help other charities, but Sadaka is where I help the most and more regularly.

"Volunteering in general should enhance the lives of both the giver and the receiver. If not, why engage in unpaid labour? This is especially true for those of us who volunteer at organisations whose aim is to alleviate human suffering in its various forms.

"It is demanding but valuable work, I find. When helping alongside groups and individuals that look after the homeless and the vulnerable, we volunteers feel the immediate impact of our actions on the lives of those who struggle on a daily basis to meet their basic needs.

"I have had various minimally paid jobs and have experienced the unforgiving nature of the private rental property market. Survival is tough if trapped in low-paid, insecure employment.

'We wouldn't try to fix people's lives'

"Giving food might not be much, but by regularly serving wholesome food without asking questions, we feel we help alleviate immediate hunger and isolation. It is one less thing to think about.

"Charities like Sadaka and New Beginnings offer those who wish to help a safe space to do so. It is heartbreaking to see people sleep rough, or hear stories of bad housing arrangements, insufficient income and chronic poor health.

"Of course the underlying issues are complex and we wouldn't try to fix people's lives. But in the meantime, members of the public can do something, and I have seen how much volunteers benefit from the work they do in and for the community.

Figure 18. Get Reading article following my nomination for the 'Pride of Reading Award'. Source: Adapted from Bosley, 2019.

Therefore, as shown by my above-mentioned nomination to an award that recognises a person's contribution to the community,[23] as well as the article's emphasis on my personal

[23] The 'Pride of Reading Award', sponsored by local companies, 'celebrates exceptional courage, standards and success from individuals and businesses across Reading' (PORA, 2022). Nominations come from members of the public who are subsequently invited to vote for their chosen nominee in each category, and in my case that of 'Community Champion'. I did not win but as noted by a Sadaka kitchen leader, I barely advertised the nomination. This was due to my unease with the article's hook concerning my so-called 'use of free hand out meal services' while a student in London (Bosley, 2019).

story, competing interests soon become apparent. The researcher's lived experience, relationships with kitchen leaders and service users, research questions and activism become gradually intertwined during the course of the research. With time and experience, however, linking in-depth involvement and scholarship can be an effective strategy when conducting qualitative research and more so with participant observation for a researcher keen to engage in activism. Attending a community initiative and immediately asking for consent to conduct research and interviews not only appears premature when so little is known about the field, but it can also be perceived as 'extractive' by some kitchen leaders. Scholar activism bridges the two worlds of academia and community-based activism, and, furthermore, for Calhoun (2008, p. xxii), it 'makes explicit the tension in much traditional thought between "really participating" and "just observing", especially in settings where social conflicts and struggles shape what participating can mean'. Researchers are privileged to be able to reflect on matters for which others embedded in the field in practical ways, such as kitchen leaders, may not have time for, and may, for example, propose to conduct a survey for the benefit of the organisation or attend meetings on behalf of charity leaders.

Yet, for Reynolds (2018), an important consideration is the time-consuming nature of building trusts with and between research partners given that it might be at the detriment of academic requirements such as the publication of theoretical peer-reviewed papers. The scholar Jahi Chappel refers to this point when he notes that effective and respectful work with organizations require allocating 'significant amounts of time' to engage with communities, and he further emphasises that 'engagement' does not equate 'research' (Levkoe et al, 2020, p. 199). This is applicable to food justice research, especially when working with community kitchen initiatives like TFNs because approaching service providers entails doing much more than contacting leaders via email or other platforms. Typically, small teams of volunteers run charities and only sporadically respond to messages, which left me little choice but to attend sessions in person, and, as in my case later in the research process, opt to volunteer and spend time with people concerned by food poverty for a significant amount of time. While I had volunteered at various homeless and food charities prior to the start of this research project, I only became an active member of the community kitchen Sadaka after months of participant observation. Directly contributing to the operations of a charity was time consuming and often led to commitments that went beyond the scope of my research, for instance when preparing meals, contacting new volunteers or assisting with sessions on a weekly basis.

Arguably, then, these interactions were not all conducive to data collection but contributed as a whole to a better understanding of the TFNs, and as posited by Pulido (2008, p.363), I noted how "[I]iving the life of the scholar activist' changed my sense of self. Chappel writes of the lack of appreciation for this kind of 'labor needed to work with non-academic communities' that is rarely appreciated within academia which leads scholar-activists to undertake this type of research 'at the cost of self-exploitation' (Levkoe et al, 2020, p.200). Cancian's (1993) findings from interviews conducted on activist-researchers refers to the lack of political engagement in research projects conducted by successful researchers, which was in sharp contrast to most activist-researchers for whom balancing the realms of academia, policy making, and the community proved challenging. Ultimately, Cancian (1993) found that commitments to both activist and academic standards hindered academic success especially in view of the demanding nature of building ties with the community and policy makers.

Another useful remark made by Cancian (1993, p.93) concerns the term 'community', which is vague because it tends to romanticise 'disadvantaged people and to cover up their internal differences and conflicts'. For Chappal, engaging with the heterogenous group of people that forms the 'community' therefore requires that scholar-activists show humility, admit their 'extra level of ignorance' by 'just showing up' and observe their non-academic colleagues (Levkoe et al., 2020, p. 300). Scholar-activists should not seek to write or propose alternatives according to social theories because this would equate assuming much about the field, however, there is scope for action for Levkoe et al. (2020, p. 302) because power relations can be disrupted 'by scholars and activists committed to calling out injustice and documenting and furthering diverse knowledges and experience'. To illustrate this point, TFN initiatives in this study are made up various groups that compete for resources and do not necessarily collaborate on similar and/or directly related issues. Furthermore, charity leaders do not typically deem that they are addressing food poverty through their service provision because they do not consider the structural aspects of their work. Their engagement consists of specific action against immediate hunger and poverty, as exemplified by a founder of Sadaka:

> You walk in town and see a rough sleeper at every corner, it's part of the landscape. I had to do something. It started with homemade food parcels that my daughter and I distributed in the streets, and it led to Sadaka, a registered charity, serving two meals a week. We had to start somewhere, and giving food was just that (Sadaka KL, 2018).

Scholars may approach the field with theories in mind, and activists with the belief that they can address social injustices; scholar-activists, by contrast, can spend time to understand

power dynamics between organisations, support them in practical ways and meet both academic and their chosen charities' requirements thanks to data collection and knowledge production. An example pertains to my own summary of volunteers' and service users' response to my question "what motivates you to contribute to the activities of Sadaka?" and "what can you tell me about your visits to Sadaka and other community kitchens?". Appearing on Sadaka's website, my summary was used to raise awareness of the charity's work in the community of Reading during the national volunteers' week in June 2020:

> Our community kitchen was set up as a registered charity in 2017 in the town of Reading to provide food to vulnerable individuals and those on low income. Sadaka's aim is to alleviate immediate hunger and to provide a safe space to combat isolation by offering weekly wholesome meals. Those who come to us come from a wide range of backgrounds. Our observations show that few are homeless and come to us for emergency food assistance: in fact, most of our users need help with accessing food all year long due to insecure employment, temporary unemployment perhaps due to poor health or personal issues, or limited resources while benefiting from Universal Credit. One of our users, a pensioner, shared that he attends our sessions to "enjoy a cooked meal with familiar faces". Though he welcomes the free food we provide, he mostly appreciates the conviviality at our Saturday sessions where he feels he is among "friends" and less lonely. Another regular service user in his fifties has been coming along to our weekly meals since we set up our kitchen. He was a carer until the death of his parents, has complex needs and relies entirely on food handouts for his meals. He tells us that places like ours "save lives" and that if it wasn't for Sadaka and other community initiatives, he would "absolutely starve, not just for food but for friendship". We are honoured when our users feel the need to "give back", as they say, by helping us at sessions, and when they tell us that it is thanks to us that they are able to keep on going and overcome their various daily hurdles.

The above was swiftly written following my interactions with attendees of a Sadaka-run session. Securing consent for sharing personal stories demands trust from service users and volunteers and therefore constitute an activity that is time-consuming for service leaders. Yet, personal stories are invaluable material for social media content—as shown in Chapter Four—that has the potential to attract funders and supporters; kitchen leaders therefore welcome such stories that capture the attention of its followers, acting as an appealing narrative 'hook'. While an ordinary volunteer may have found the task of speaking to service users and drafting a short summary challenging, a researcher embedded in the field may find the endeavour more straightforward. Combining scholarship and activism can therefore encourage taking action and social change within grassroots, and more so for Reynolds et al. (2018) if the project is supported by an organisation, and researchers remain with it for some time. In my case, my volunteering with charities only stopped at the start of the pandemic but my

engagement continued online, for instance with the creation of digital content for Sadaka's social media platforms and the recruitment of volunteers using online tools.

In that way, radical food geography can lead to valuable outputs not only on the ground for and with activists through practical help with the running of charities or the drafting of material for websites or funding applications, but also in academia, for instance with the publication of research papers or presentation of findings at conferences. Noteworthy are the ethical considerations when working within the community, and as highlighted by Couture (2017, p. 145) during transitions from '"pure" activism to more research-oriented work'. Overall, my findings suggest that when confronting the roots of injustices becomes the main driver of research and activism, radical food geography is practiced in ways that empower those who need and provide support both indirectly though academic work and directly through personal engagement. Arguably, this might constitute an additional and novel practice of food justice, following Slocum and Cadieux (2015), in the aim to promote 'reconnections' through food and the act of caring in the community, as suggested by Kneafsey et al. (2008, p.50).

4. Conclusions

This chapter explored how food justice might be practiced using the case study of TFNs in and around the town of Reading, UK. Based on my engagement with the TFN in Reading, and in particular one specific charity, Sadaka, I reflected on how qualitative methodologies—self-reflection, participant observation and discussions with TFN leaders, volunteers and service users— can be employed to collect data and engage in activism against food poverty. Building on existing research that made use of participatory methodologies in food studies, the main contribution of this chapter is an exploration of what it meant to become a scholar-activist engaged in TFN initiatives for and with the community, while producing research in line with academic requirements. I first situated the chapter in wider debates on scholar activism and those coming from food justice, and scholar-activist research in food justice. I then reflected on how the researcher's personality may affect the fieldwork process and the resultant production of knowledge. I concluded the review of existing and relevant literature with a discussion on the use of visceral methods in human geography research where participatory methods have been employed to explore the experience of conducting research with and for individuals who are considered vulnerable.

In the analysis section, I first began by considering positionality in the research process and using the notion of 'hidden ethnography', I explored how researchers might negotiate the emotional and personal aspects of conducting fieldwork with vulnerable individuals. In the second part of the analysis, I discussed the deployment of visceral methodologies in food poverty research, noting the value of reflecting on the visceral when engaging with food, community-led initiatives and their service users. I also explored what the visceral might reveal about motivations for individual or socio-political organising. Lastly, I considered how the self as scholar-activist must work with people and groups in order to conduct research and also be part of political projects like the TFNs. I exposed my experiences of activist scholarship, reflecting on my positionality and my navigation of the complications of data collection which at times appeared to compete with my attempts to support food insecure individuals and the TFN charity of Sadaka in particular. In this, I presented the tensions that arose in using this approach to collect data but to also do the political work of reducing the immediate hunger of individuals at the same time I, and the organisations I worked with, attempt to confront the structural processes of food injustice, poverty and inequality.

Further food poverty research could employ methodologies that make use of a scholar-activist approach, which might facilitate the process of data collection and contribute in positive ways to public-led initiatives. As argued in this chapter, activist scholarship may enact social change with and for grassroots social movements despite the challenges of adopting a radical stance as an activist throughout the research process and within academia more generally. Additional research would also build on findings from this research project to explore the value of partnerships with grassroots, practitioners and those with lived experience of the topic being researched. Similar to discussions in this chapter, it might be worth exploring whether scholar activism could be encouraged among researchers in the food poverty and food justice movements in order to advance knowledge while concurrently reducing immediate hunger and working for a more just food system.

In line with Levkoe et al. (2020), I conclude that radical good geography is greatly enhanced through collaborative research with community initiatives, which can lead to useful outputs in academic and activist realms. I suggest that scholar activism is an approach that enables researchers to practice food justice and fill knowledge gaps, and in so doing, contribute to newer alternatives to current unequal food systems in a bid to alleviate growing food poverty.

Chapter Six. Conclusions

This thesis sought to gain a better understanding of community empowerment through the study of networked charitable initiatives that serve food to marginalised individuals. These charitable initiatives—known as the TFN—are grassroots-focused, registered entities that respond to national (and now global) food insecurity outside the formalised emergency food banking system. In the UK, community kitchens have been set up by the public to serve food and offer cooked meals, fresh produce and long-life foods as well as other essentials to individuals who cannot purchase food as regularly as they would like, or who cannot access or afford any at all, even via the formalised institutions of food banks (Loopstra, 2018a). Initiatives with the TFN consist of small groups of individuals who come together to cook large quantities of mainly donated, surplus food, the times and locations of which often vary or change rapidly, and they are also variously attached to faith or secular community groups of differing organisation structures and/or size.

The thesis explored three main areas of analysis across its three empirical chapters:

1. How community kitchens alleviate immediate hunger and food poverty through the empirical cases of community kitchens in southern England and predominantly Reading;
2. How citizens have responded to growing poverty, inequalities and injustices in the food system; and
3. How transformative food politics occur through community empowerment and the act of caring.

Two conceptual approaches underpinned this research project. The first is that of food justice and the second is that of care ethics. Food justice emphasises equity in the ways food is produced, distributed and consumed, and offers an alternative, more communitarian approach to the dominant food system (Cadieux and Slocum, 2015; Gottlieb and Joshi, 2013). Care ethics has been used to refer to a critical ethic of care and responsibility by means of a collective that challenges how neoliberal approaches have marginalised care and privatised responsibility (Lawson, 2007), especially in food (e.g. Kneafsey et al., 2021). Accordingly, community kitchens as part of the TFN are seen as relational spaces of care that take

responsibility for those in food poverty and seek to address injustices to make the world a better place. Such a view is in line with Cloke and colleagues (2016, p.2) whose work exposes the 'hopeful and progressive possibilities' inherent to what they term 'spaces of care', that is, food banks and other food aid providers, which tend to be criticised for merely responding to the immediate symptoms of food poverty rather than addressing underlying issues. The first empirical chapter (Chapter Three) discussed community empowerment through the study of networked charitable initiatives, coined here as 'Twilight Food Networks' (TFNs) that operate as spaces of care and facilitators of greater food justice. The second empirical chapter (Chapter Four) evaluated how community food projects use digital platforms to practice these forms of food justice and ethics of care, promote their work, create links with wide-ranging partners and establish themselves as 'real' entities. The last empirical chapter (Chapter Five) considered the modes by which academics may study community food projects, and the role of the activist-researcher in participatory food-related research as a contribution to debates on PAR, visceral food research and the tensions in the production of 'hidden' ethnographies.

This concluding chapter will provide an overview of the key findings of the individual chapters and overall thesis. It will detail the study's empirical contributions, its relevance for theory and practice, and it will end with avenues for further research.

1. Key findings of the thesis

The thesis was written in the format of three individual academic papers, each focusing on individual aspects of the research project. A comprehensive literature review (Chapter Two) provided a detailed contextualisation of this thesis within the literature while the discussion of research design and methodology was stated in the Introduction and embedded in each chapter, along with a shorter discussion of the specific literature and debates each chapter is situated within. Chapter Three addressed all main research questions. The second and third main questions are discussed in Chapter Four: 'how citizens have responded to growing poverty, inequalities and injustices in the food system' and 'how transformative food politics occur through community empowerment and the act of caring'. Lastly, Chapter Five focussed more narrowly on the first research question, i.e. 'How community kitchens alleviate immediate hunger and food poverty' and on the second research question.

More specifically, the first research question, i.e., 'how community kitchens alleviate immediate hunger and food poverty through the empirical cases of community kitchens in southern England and predominantly Reading' was addressed in two of the empirical chapters. Chapter Three discussed the modes by which organisations within Reading's TFNs provide food to economically marginalised individuals whereas Chapter Five explored my role as a scholar-activist while conducting research on the charitable food provisioning system in the town of Reading. The second research question, i.e., 'how citizens have responded to growing poverty, inequalities and injustices in the food system' was mainly discussed in Chapter Four where I exposed how social media platforms are used by service leaders to run sessions and ensure the longevity of charities within TFNs. The 'twilight' nature of initiatives may appear nefarious to the successful provision of food over time but in fact, the opposite was found to be true. In this study, public-led groups that emerged to respond to growing food insecurity benefited from being grassroots that made use of social media platforms to promote their activities and raise awareness.

(9) The third research question 'how transformative food politics occur through community empowerment and the act of caring' was covered in Chapters Three and Four. Chapter Three demonstrated that TFNs encourage 'community empowerment' via the active engagement of members of the public in initiatives that counter food injustices. (also correction no 10) Such collective empowerment that emanates from individuals that form groups to almost instantly act against what they deem unjust might be otherwise termed 'relational individual activism'. Furthermore, this Chapter identified TFN initiatives as spaces of care that provide support systems for individuals who experience hardship, isolation and may not have recourse to public funds, for example. Chapter Four shows the value of social media in securing a transformative orientation in debates around food insecurity because virtual connections enable local, real-life solutions to growing levels of insecurity. This point is increasingly crucial in view of the digitalisation of society, a phenomenon that intensified during the pandemic, where more and more people work and interact online rather than in person. Lastly, the current cost of living crisis means that it is not only *food* insecurity that affects an ever-increasing number of people, but insecurity may concern a wider range of basic necessities, such as heating or shelter, hence the recent growth of 'warm banks'. The key findings of all Chapters are summarised below.

The first empirical chapter (Chapter Three) sought to understand how community charitable initiatives address growing food poverty in the UK. This network of informal and fleeting food justice organisations is grouped under the umbrella concept of the TFN, coined to emphasise the ephemeral nature of those initiatives that respond to unequal access to food in urban centres. Community kitchens and other food justice organisations in this thesis were found to operate as spaces of care, building on Tronto (1993), where volunteers' commitments to initiatives are motivated by consideration for the needs of others. This was exemplified, for example, by a new volunteer who congratulated everyone for 'being involved in a beautiful initiative' and for engaging in 'a priceless, giving way with others' making it all about 'caring and sharing' following her first shift at a community kitchen (Sadaka V, 2020). The fleeting and fluctuating web of charitable initiatives within the TFNs provides food to anyone who needs it, without asking questions, and aptly adapts to volunteers' availability and resources, as well as current events. An example concerns the TFN's response to the Covid-19 pandemic when more people required food assistance due to loss of income, isolation or illness. During that time, volunteer-led initiatives could swiftly adapt their service provision and cease in-door activities which were unsafe, and instead opt for outdoor parcel distribution only. The pandemic gave rise to a citizen-led movement that responded to the crisis by forming mutual aid groups or hubs as part of the TFN and by contributing to existing charities within the TFN that could adapt to circumstances in real time.

The second empirical chapter (Chapter Four) focused on the use of information and communication technologies (ICTs) by community kitchens to run their operations. Local food initiatives were found to make use of digital platforms to create new forms of activism through their connective 'internet-enhanced' action. The discussion exposed how charity leaders adopt social media and other digital tools to communicate, fundraise and organise their activities, a practice that is well-suited to the ephemeral initiatives within the TFN given their capacity to adapt to current events, as discussed in Chapter Three. The online presence of initiatives appeared to not only promote greater awareness of community kitchens' activities in the community, but also act as a catalyst for greater civic participation and food justice. Drawing upon the concept of 'digital food activism', the chapter demonstrates that online engagement affects how the public conceptualises, experiences, and addresses food insecurity through volunteering or others forms of advocacy. Examples of this advocacy include online activism of kitchen volunteers who are 'networked individuals' following Rainie

and Wellman (2014), in this thesis by setting up an online fundraising campaign to collect funds for the charity Sadaka and to raise awareness of food poverty, independently—but nevertheless in partnership with—the charity. Such networked individualism encourages greater public interest, donations and access to public finding, all of which contributes to initiatives that work towards alleviating food poverty amongst the most marginalised of individuals. This chapter considered how the use of digital platforms leads to community-building and secures the long-term survival of otherwise ephemeral groups within the TFN. Building on the notion of 'virtual reconnection' within AFNs, as argued by Bos and Owen (2016), I found that online spaces have indeed altered social relations offline, and that they are not only supplementary but that they highly enhance 'socio-material reconnections'. Consequently, initiatives not only benefit from digital activism, but they also reap the rewards of their virtual engagements in terms of running their operations and ensuring their long-term survival in the ephemeral space of TFNs.

The last empirical chapter (Five) explored the modes by which academics study community food projects, and the role of the activist-researcher in participatory research. Through ethnography, participant observation and becoming part of a community food kitchen in Reading, I reflected on the role of the activist-scholarship in enacting social change with and for social movements. My exploration of initiatives that responded to growing poverty, inequalities and injustices in the food system, the second main research question, led to my own involvement in the Reading TFN. This chapter exposed mixed loyalties for the scholar-activist during fieldwork by considering positionality in the research process and using the notion of ‘hidden ethnography’. I explored how researchers might negotiate the emotional and personal aspects of conducting fieldwork with vulnerable individuals and noted the value of visceral methodologies when engaging with food, community-led initiatives and their service users. Reflecting on the visceral was found particularly useful in efforts towards revealing motivations for individual or socio-political organising. I considered the important ethical considerations that the scholar-activist must address throughout the research process, for instance by ensuring explicit consent at every stage of the project even when the later was initially granted. Lastly, it discussed how scholar activism can facilitate partnerships with grassroots organisations, practitioners and those with lived experiences of poverty which in turn enables researchers in food justice movements to advance knowledge and positively contribute to social justice.

This research project set out to discuss the dynamics of food initiatives within the TFN and their efforts towards the alleviation of immediate hunger and food poverty. It sought to explore how citizens have responded to growing poverty, inequalities and injustices in the food system and whether transformative food politics can occur through community empowerment and the act of caring. Through volunteering for community kitchens, citizens contribute to emergency food provisioning and the relief of issues that affect marginalised individuals and anyone undergoing hardship. This point refers to the third research question, 'how transformative food politics occur through community empowerment and the act of caring', given that public-led contributions can be considered to constitute 'relational individual activism'. As seen in Chapter Five, networked individualism has the potential to create links and partnerships between service providers, and it is through the creation of these relationships and their upkeep that the TFNs successfully responds to growing food poverty. In that sense, relational activism concerns and enables acts of caring in groups marked by inequalities: citizens care enough about injustices to come together with a view to provide free food to people in low income households.

In post-covid times marked by economic, political and social anxieties, the TFN proved highly adaptable to the restrictions and public health guidance to contain the pandemic. Chapter Four discussed my involvement as an activist-researcher in the online activities of the community initiatives, which, as shown in Chapter Four, played an important role in efforts aimed at ensuring ongoing food service provision despite uncertainties. The analysis of TFN websites and their social media posts, in addition to my role as the social media lead for one particular kitchen, suggested the value of digital activism in the food movement given its capacity to act as an impetus behind greater public interest in issues that affect economically marginalised individuals. Despite adverse considerations such as online surveillance and the digital divide, findings from Chapter Four identified the value of an ICT-enabled social space for kitchens to raise awareness about food poverty and make themselves appear 'real' to funders, volunteers and guests. Therefore, through its initiatives, the TFN responds to the needs of the UK's most vulnerable, it provides a critical outlet for volunteers to engage in networked individualism and in so doing, uses digital activism to address poverty and promote greater social justice.

2. Contribution to scholarship and academic debates in food geographies

This thesis contributes to theoretical, empirical and methodological debates within three main domains. The first contribution is to food geography, by considering the place of fleeting charitable initiatives in the forms of second generation AFNs through the novel introduction and analysis of the concept of the TFN and its relationship to AFNs, food banks, food poverty and food justice. This project fills an important gap in research on community-based food projects in the UK. Much existing literature and empirical work has explored the role of food banks in addressing rising levels of food poverty, but few have explored community kitchens, and as discussed in the Chapter Three and Four, community empowerment through the study of networked charitable initiatives in the form of the TFN. Building on Kneafsey et al. (2021), an important theoretical implication of this study is that community kitchens are a core, but hitherto missing aspect of the second generation of AFNs that address wider political food system pressures and inequalities. These kitchens are emergency food providers that operate independently of food banks but nevertheless rely on mainstream food systems to alleviate hunger in the community.

The second contribution concerns digital media through the exploration of the intersections between ICT-enabled tools, digital activism, food poverty and TFN initiatives. This study makes several contributions to the current literature on digital activism by surveying how community food projects use digital platforms to run their operations, promote their work and create links with wide-ranging partners. Findings confirm previous research conclusions by Bos and Owen (2016) regarding the value of online media in extending the offline socio-material connections of AFNs. Initiatives' online presence does not occur at the expense of their in-person engagements and, on the contrary, they contribute to their establishment as 'real' entities within the TFNs. Furthermore, drawing on Rainie and Wellman's (2014) concept of networked individualism, this study found that an online presence enables volunteers to act against determinants of food insecurity and in turn influence public perceptions of various forms of insecurities.

Lastly, this thesis complements research that relies on participatory methods and activist scholarship to co-produce knowledge with community members and to enact social change. As discussed in Chapter Five, while scholar or researcher activists can produce engaged

research in the food movement, positionality and ethical principles must nevertheless be carefully considered throughout the research process. My findings therefore add to reflections on activist-scholarship in food poverty studies, and the modes by which community food projects may be studied with a view to ensure positive outcomes for all stakeholders. Overall, this study complements earlier food bank research, and in particular, it strengthens Cloke et al.'s (2016) conceptual approach to voluntary initiatives as spaces of care and welfare capable of promoting values that challenge the problematic effects of a neoliberal food system. 'In the meantime' politics (ibid.) allow for a departure away from analytical binaries commonly found in food poverty research where food aid is criticised for only addressing the symptoms of systemic inequalities in the UK and the US and compared to 'sticking plaster' (De Schutter et al., 2019). This thesis therefore conceptualises initiatives within the TFNs as spaces that open possibilities for 'hopeful transformations in political and ethical praxis' (Cloke et al., 2016, p.19). In that respect, community kitchens offer options to 'think and act outside the charity food charity box' (Riches, 2011, p.775) because in addition to relieving immediate hunger, they also enable citizens to tend to various social injustices that affect marginalised individuals and those on low income or undergoing other types of hardship.

3. Practice and policy: moving forward in a post-Covid world

This study has raised important questions about the nature of emergency food assistance in the community and ways in which charitable initiatives respond to food poverty in southern England. The research project began prior to the start of the pandemic when consensus among food poverty scholars already held austerity measures and welfare reform largely responsible for the growth of food aid provisioning in the form of food banking. Although I was not able to conduct ethnographic research during the pandemic, I continued to contribute to the activities of the Reading TFN using ICT-enabled media, for instance by creating social media content for the charity Sadaka, liaising with volunteers or compiling lists of TFN initiatives for the town of Reading. Formal interviews that had been planned in early 2020 were conducted online when possible although the uncertainty that marked the first lockdowns meant that accessing kitchen leaders was challenging. While several TFNs ceased their activities during the pandemic, others shifted to parcel collection only, and additional

mutual aid groups emerged to support increasing numbers of food insecure individuals (Mould et al., 2022).

In line with my observations, the Covid-19 pandemic was subsequently found to have not only aggravated the issue of food poverty worldwide due to factors such as supply chain disruptions and loss of income, but it was also found to have magnified the problem according to charities and international bodies (WHO, 2021). In the UK, a 2021 report published by the Food Foundation estimated that approximately five million adults had been food insecure from March 2020 to January 2021, or 9% of households, compared with two million pre-lockdown, or 7.6% of households (Food Foundation, 2021). According to that same report, the chief reasons for experiencing food insecurity, in order of importance, were not enough money for food (55%), isolation (31%) and lack of access and supply (23%). The UK government's various support schemes, including the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme also known as 'furlough', weekly Universal Credit uplifts of £20 and working tax credits did not stop individuals from falling into poverty during the pandemic. *The Big Issue* magazine has published numerous articles showing that that welfare did not sufficiently support individuals during the pandemic, where redundancies, furlough schemes and income losses contributed to increased levels of poverty UK-wide (Westwater, 2021). Recent Department of Work and Pension statistics estimate that 6 million people were on Universal Credit on 14 January, which represents a 98% increase since the 12th of March 2020 (DWP, 2021b). Additionally, the same data show an increase in the numbers of claims made to Universal Credit at the start of the pandemic, and particularly in the first lockdown, with 1.1 million claiming benefits between 20th of March and 2nd of April 2020, the equivalent of ten times the weekly average for the year to 12 March 2020. Local food aid providers as part of the TFN showed their resilience and ability to respond to the crisis by refraining from interrupting their services during the pandemic and adapting to varying Covid-19 regulation and guidance. Chapter Four showed how initiatives relied on their existing online presence to organise themselves and pursue their service provision despite fears of infection. Digital platforms were invaluable tools during the pandemic because they enabled communication via online meetings and social media posts, which meant that TFN initiatives could safely provide food to increasing numbers of vulnerable people.

For anti-food poverty charities such as the Independent Food Aid Network, the Food Foundation or Sustain's Food Power, the pandemic presented an opportunity to combat the institutionalisation of food aid in the UK, for instance, by extending the provision of 'Free Schools Meals, increasing the value of Healthy Start vouchers, bringing back or topping up Local Welfare Assistance schemes, reducing the waiting times for Universal Credit and ensuring jobs pay at least the real Living Wage' (Guerlain, 2020). *The Big Issue* has argued in favour of maintaining the weekly Universal Credit uplift of £20 to protect families and individuals on low-income and enable them to maintain an acceptable standard of living. Dr Dora-Olivia Vicol, executive director of the Work Rights Centre, is cited to support the claim that the welfare system ought to help people most affected by the pandemic: 'a decent welfare system can constitute a real lifeline. We just need to stop seeing it as a drain, and acknowledge that, when they are at their most vulnerable, people need support, not the threat of destitution' (Westwater, 2021).

As shown by the recent reports and accounts cited above, current debates and data indicate the worsening of food insecurity post-Covid, and recent increases in living costs, partly in response to global unrest and the Ukraine war, are expected to reinforce this trend. By making community activism visible and prompting interest among the wider population, TFN organisations' online engagement encourage immediate and 'in the meantime' civic participation. Citizens can come together to act against injustices, hunger and poverty in the Global North; furthermore, as shown in Chapter Five, activist-researchers may work in partnership with charity leaders to produce valuable research that gives that a voice to the food poverty movement and influence policy. This thesis has confirmed that citizen-led initiatives can offer an alternative approach to that of food banks in the alleviation of food poverty in the UK and the Global North, and beyond hunger relief, community kitchens are spaces of conviviality, care, civic engagement and exchange among individuals of various backgrounds.

4. Further research

This qualitative study is limited to the area of Reading and surroundings therefore its findings cannot be generalised to a wider context. However, findings can be applicable to urban centres in the UK and in particular to the least equal large towns and cities in the Greater

South East such as Cambridge, Oxford and London where income disparities are the highest compared with other UK cities, according to a report published by Centre for Cities in 2018 (CfC, 2018, p.60). Similar research could be conducted to identify local TFNs and ways in which they respond to food poverty, which would strengthen the food movement and create stronger links between emergency food providers, the public and food aid recipients. Currently, the exact number of community kitchens is unknown, but valuable data collected by the Independent Food Aid Network point to 3500 'food aid providers distributing meals and other forms of food aid' across the UK, in addition to 2,565 Trussell Trust and independent food parcel distributors commonly known as food banks (IFAN, 2022). Despite the fleeting nature of TFN initiatives that complicates efforts to quantify them, further research would build on this thesis to map TFNs in other UK regions and EU cities. Such work could be done by partnering with existing alliances such as IFAN but not only, and include, for instance, local authorities and commissioned services.

Further empirical research could address the health and wellbeing benefits of community food initiatives from a public health perspective given that this present research only touched upon this aspect of the TFN. A review of the limited literature on community kitchens by Iacovou et al. (2012) suggested that kitchens positively contribute to the social and nutritional health of low-income individuals and their families. In line with Iacovou et al's (2012) recommendations, future research could employ innovative qualitative or quantitative methods to assess community kitchens in view of drafting a strategy in evidence-based public health practice. More research would also delve into the use of ICT-enabled technologies by community kitchens to establish how online engagement might improve their activities and links with partners. Here as well, both quantitative and qualitative methods could be used to determine specific needs that could be met with digital platforms in order to better serve vulnerable populations and utilise existing resources as well as volunteers' skills.

This thesis is a summation of my involvement with community initiatives over a relatively short period of time. Given the considerable amount of existing research on food banks and lived experience of those living in poverty, I question the need for supplementary research unless this is done by researcher-activists who immerse themselves in the running of charities and seek to positively contribute to the TFN, for example, through the improvement of their communication pathways, fundraising efforts or other measurable outcomes. In January

2021, the former education secretary Gavin Williamson announced funding cuts in creative arts education to the benefit of science subjects that support key industries and helped deliver vital services during the Covid pandemic (Weale, 2021). Therefore, in light of limited funding for research within the humanities in years to come, emphasis might be on activism-oriented research in social movements with the aim of changing material conditions from resulting knowledge production.

When food banks are increasingly subject to criticism, from their own management paradoxically who deplore the normalisation of food banks as a response to poverty (Robson, 2022), community kitchens are expected to face similar disapproval given that they are also emergency food providers. Newer initiatives such as community clubs run by the National Food Service Network that offer free or low cost food cooked for and by volunteers are introducing an alternative system to that discussed in this thesis (NFS, 2022). Arguably, such initiatives promote food justice in their vision of a 'world free from food insecurity, social inequality, social isolation and food waste' (ibid); in practice, further research could explore such new approaches to determine their impact on local communities and whether they reach the most vulnerable. Throughout my research project and as an active member of a community kitchen, I engaged with a set of novel approaches to bringing fresh, healthy and free food to people from a variety of backgrounds with equivocation and purpose that suggests that further work needs to be done with local authorities, service providers and TFN initiatives to ensure that marginalised individuals are adequately fed, and supported with tools to help them overcome barriers to participation in social, educational, economic and political life.

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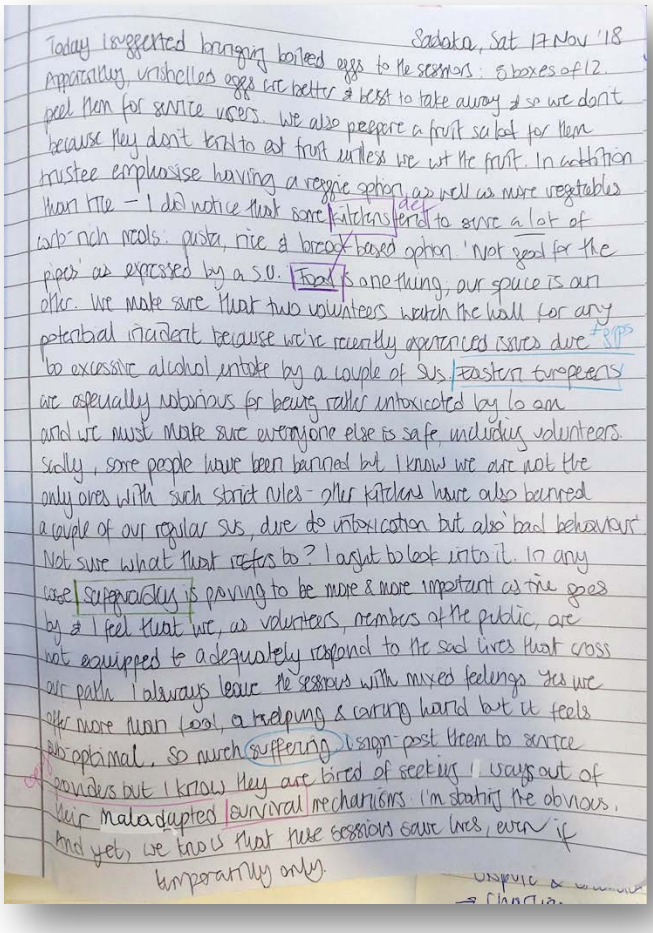
Appendix A. Set of questions to kitchen leaders for Chapter Four

Adapted from Harris and McCabe (2017a).

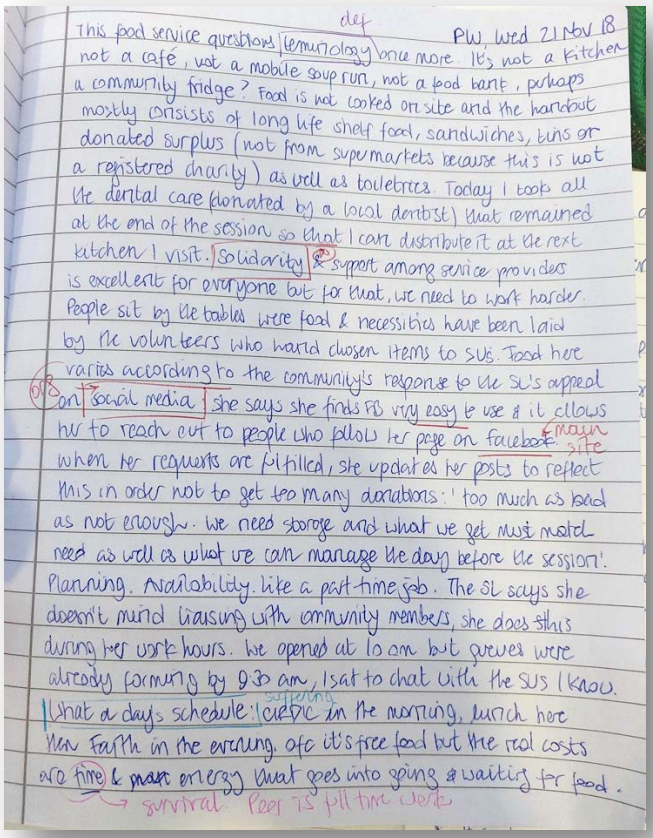
1. What are the motivations for your community groups to use social media, and what are the explanations for non-use?
2. Which platforms do you use and why?
3. Who runs the social media accounts in your charity?
4. If you do use social media, in what ways it is beneficial and/or problematic for your organisation?
5. Do you use other platforms e.g., emails, WhatsApp to organise your volunteers/fundraise?
6. Do you use social media to send political messages?
7. What do you achieve on social media that you couldn't do in person?
8. Have you attended any course on the use of social media or other digital tools?
9. Social media is seen as a means of promoting dialogue beyond the mainstream media. Voluntary and community groups have been criticised, however, for using social media as little more than a means of broadcasting. What do you think?
10. Can you remember a specific occurrence when social media particularly helped your charity?
11. Can you think of an instance where a post was particularly well or badly received?
12. What might be the 'tipping points' at the community level for social media transitioning from primarily social uses to effective political mobilisation and activism?
13. Do you think that the use of social media for campaigning helps to bring about genuine and lasting empowerment?

Appendix B. Examples of field notes



Sadaka, Sat 17 Nov '18

Today I suggested bringing boiled eggs to the sessions: 5 boxes of 12. Apparently, unshelled eggs are better & best to take away & so we don't peel them for service users. We also prepare a fruit salad for them because they don't tend to eat fruit unless we cut the fruit. In addition trustee emphasise having a veggie option as well as more vegetables than rice – I did notice that some kitchens tend to serve a lot of carb rich meals: pasta, rice & bread based option. 'Not good for the pipes' as expressed by a SU. Food is one thing, our space is an other. We make sure that two volunteers watch the hall for any potential incident because we've recently experienced issues due to excessive alcohol intake by a couple of SUs. Eastern europeans are especially notorious for being rather intoxicated by 10 am and we must make sure everyone else is safe, including volunteers. Sadly, some people have been banned but I know we are not the only ones with such strict rules – other kitchens have also banned a couple of our regular SUs, due do intoxication but also bad behaviour. Not sure what that refers to? I ought to look into it. In any case, safeguarding is proving to be more & more important as time goes by & I feel that we, as volunteers, members of the public, are not equipped to adequately respond to the sad lives that cross our path. I always leave the sessions with mixed feelings. Yes we offer more than food, a helping & caring hand but it feels sub-optimal. So much suffering. I sign-post them to service providers but I know they are tired of seeking / ways out of their maladapted survival mechanisms. I'm stating the obvious. And yet, we know that these sessions save lives, even if temporarily only.



PW, Wed 21 Nov 18

This food service questions terminology once more. It's not a kitchen not a cafe, not a mobile soup run, not a food bank, perhaps a community fridge? Food is not cooked on site and the handout mostly consists of long life shelf food, sandwiches, buns or donated surplus (not from supermarkets because this is not a registered charity) as well as toiletries. Today I took all the dental care donated by a local dentist) that remained at the end of the session so that I can distribute it at the next kitchen I visit. Solidarity & support among service providers is excellent for everyone but for that, we need to work harder. People sit by the tables where food & necessities have been laid by the volunteers who hand chosen items to SUs. Food here varies according to the community's response to the SU's appeal on social media. She says she finds FB very easy to use & it allows her to reach out to people who follow her page on facebook. When her requests are fulfilled, she updates her posts to reflect this in order not to get too many donations: 'too much as bad as not enough. We need storage and what we get must match need as well as what we can manage the day before the session'. Planning. Availability. Like a part-time job. The SL says she doesn't mind liaising with community members, she does this during her work hours. We opened at 10 am but queues were already forming by 9.30 am, I sat to chat with the SUs I know. What a day's schedule: chaotic in the morning, lunch here then Faith in the evening. Ofc it's free food but the real costs are time & most energy that goes into going & waiting for food.

survival. Peer is pt time clerk