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“You should be able to eat that meal and feel like someone cares”: community food carers, good food, and the emergence of food-aid mutualism during Covid-19

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"You should be able to eat that meal and feel like someone cares": Community food carers, good food, and the emergence of food-aid mutualism during Covid-19

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ABSTRACT

Austerity policies in the UK have fostered a 'foodbank society' by reducing state support and normalising reliance on charitable aid and poor-quality food. As a result, individuals' physical, emotional, and mental relationships with food are being reshaped. This paper draws upon on geographies of mutual aid and care and the visceral framework in food geographies, to examine the improvised community foodwork that emerged in Manchester during the Covid-19 pandemic. Using qualitative interviews and participatory foodwork in a local food bank, I show how community food workers reintroduced good food into emergency food provision by attending to dignity, agency and sensory pleasure rather than prioritising scarcity and functionality. At the same time, I found that these practices also supported the food workers own emotional wellbeing during the uncertainty surrounding lockdown events. Whilst this foodwork forged reciprocal affective relations, it also sits in an ambivalent political space shaped by welfare retreat, is vulnerable to neoliberal co-optation and is also over-reliant on unpaid gendered and racialised labour. I therefore conceptualise this convergence of material and affective care as *food mutualism*, a form of reciprocal nourishment that emerges through foodwork and both challenges and reproduces the inequalities produced by austerity. By engaging with both the political stakes of mutualism and viscerality this work provides insight into how community-based food aid might be reimagined beyond the neoliberal foodbank model in ways that centre dignity, reciprocity, and sensory pleasure.

1. Introduction

In the Global North, particularly during Covid and after, food poverty has continued to rise (The Food Foundation, 2021; Francis-Devine et al., 2024), altering people's physical, emotional and mental relationships with food (Goodman, 2016; Strong, 2023). Throughout urban foodscapes in the US, UK and Europe, food banks, soup kitchens, pantries, and social supermarkets have proliferated rapidly in response to the hunger and deprivation faced by those who have been subjected to the harsh realities of neoliberal austerity policies and the various implications of living crises (Cloke et al., 2020; Hall, 2022; Strong, 2022; Milbourne, 2024). The increasing dependence on foodbanks and food pantries, where potentially depersonalized and sometimes dehumanizing neoliberal approaches to emergency food provision are often the order of things, reflects the extent of the state neglect of vulnerable people living in states of poverty, precarity and hunger (Williams et al., 2016; Cloke et al., 2017; Power, 2022).

Living on a foodbank or significantly low budget diet can remove the dignity, agency, or individuality associated with eating, leaving people with no choice but to consume food they have no or little desire to eat (Hayes-Conroy and Hayes-Conroy 2008; Goodman, 2016; Strong, 2023), resulting in emotional anxieties around food (Bruckner et al., 2021). Yet, when considering foodbanks and pantries, attention is often paid to factors such as health and nutrition and whether food parcels offer sufficient calorie intake for the food insecure and hungry (Garthwaite et al., 2015), and /or whether people have access to affordable energy to cook with in the first place (Garthwaite, 2016; Snell et al., 2018). Often overlooked are the "viscerality of hunger" (Bruckner et al., 2021, p. 101) and the pleasure and enjoyability of food and drinks provided to clients and customers who use foodbanks and food pantries. The visceral realm is the space where one's food cravings, moods, and responses emerge (Hayes-Conroy and Hayes-Conroy, 2008) which can sometimes be negatively triggered by foodbank diets. As both Hayes-Conroy and Hayes-Conroy (2008) and Strong (2022) argue, engaging with the visceral is essential, it is political, and it can be "a means to trace power through the body" (Hayes-Conroy and Hayes-Conroy, 2008, p. 1).

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Taste, which holds two distinct meanings in the English language in "a biological sense and a cultural construct of preferences" (Freedman, 2025), is a vital yet often underestimated aspect of the daily compromises made by those experiencing food poverty. Very often foodbank users sacrifice bodily and biological pleasure, comfort and a sense of 'the familiar' that food usually and historically provides to satisfy one or one's family's hunger. Foodbank users are faced with embodied challenges of navigating neoliberal stigma (de Souza, 2019) and visceral feelings of shame (Garthwaite, 2016), visceral responses of "disgust" and/or "discomfort" during the eating of undesired albeit 'free' and/or very low-cost meals (Strong, 2023, p. 462), and a feeling of lack of agency combined with the perpetual anxiety surrounding procurement (Bruckner et al., 2021). As argued by Bruckner et al (2021), the food distributed by food poverty organisation may be "free" in a financial sense, yet it often comes with emotional costs of shame and guilt for the receiver as well as the need to tamp down one's and one's family's taste buds in the effort to get enough calories to eat. These embodied experiences of accessing and consuming food reveal the importance of the affective and sensory deprivations experienced by foodbank users and the growing need and desire to counter these deprivations through the provisioning of 'good' foods to these individuals and families.

In response to these and othermultiple and intersecting forms of deprivation, geographical scholars concerned with food and care have increasingly explored alternative, care-based approaches to food provision with the potential to recentre the sensory, emotional, and cultural significance of food (Mann, 2024; Sharp, 2020; Puig de la Bellacasa, 2015; Dowler et al., 2009). These scholars argue that integrating care within foodscapes offers an alternative to capitalist, neoliberal structures that underpin current food systems (Sharp, 2020) as it is grounded in economies of care rather than extraction, exploitation and deprivation designed to socially engineer more work from marginalised populations (Gibson-Graham, 2008). These and other perspectives, framed through an ethics of care, articulate the need for a holistic reimagining of how we think about food systems, particularly in terms of (re)centring not just care but also compassion and equality for others (and other species), along with social justice, as the motivations and outcomes for a sustainable food system (Wylie, 2024; Hodge, et al., 2022; Sharp, 2020). This involves engaging with alternative forms of care that consider not only how food is grown and distributed (Sharp, 2020; Puig de la Bellacasa, 2015), but also who has access to it (Cloke et al., 2017), and how unsustainable food habits can be challenged through placing emphasis on the sensory and nutritional benefits of food (Hayes-Conroy and Hayes-Conroy 2008; Carolan, 2015; Goodman, 2016).

Building on these ideas, this paper explores the community foodwork carried out outside the realm of institutionalised food banking to feed those in food poverty during the Covid-19 pandemic. I argue that through the provision of 'good food', which is healthy, tasty, comforting and culturally appropriate, this foodwork had, and continues to have, the potential to reclaim visceral pleasures and undo the shame, restrictions, disgust and discomfort accompanying food poverty, and break the decades of "visceral violence" often associated with foodbanks and other 'free' food programmes (Goodman, 2016, p. 4; Bruckner et al., 2021).

This paper is structured as follows. The literature review explores the development of the visceral framework in food geographies and its relevance in engaging with socio-political issues of food poverty and the subsequent deprivation and denial of sensory pleasure from consuming foodbank and low-income diets. I then examine how care, mutual aid, and resource sharing emerged during the Covid-19 pandemic and other crises (see for example Reese and Johnson, 2022; Springer, 2020; Mould et al.,2022a; Mould et al., 2022b), highlighting the role of community foodwork in filling gaps in the social infrastructure that has been ravaged by austerity cuts, leaving people without adequate food provision (Cloke et al., 2020; Hall, 2022; Strong, 2022). Further, as mutual aid scholars warn, community care during crises sits in an ambivalent political space, vulnerable to neoliberal co-optation as volunteers and local networks absorb responsibilities that the state has withdrawn from (Spade, 2020; Preston and Firth, 2020; Mould et al.,2022a).

Next, drawing upon a case study of Manchester, England during the Covid-19 pandemic I apply a qualitative multimethod approach to explore the informal and improvised, yet crucial, foodwork by those referred to here as community food carers. Manchester's history of civic organising (Levidow and Psarikidou, 2012) and austerity driven growth of third-sector food groups (Oncini, 2021) meant a significant food poverty infrastructure was in place as the pandemic hit, enabling a rapid, improvised mobilisation in food-aid responses during Covid-19. Coming from various professional backgrounds including chefs, doctors, civil society workers, and volunteers, these food carers took significant responsibility for feeding those who had entered the Covid-19 pandemic in states of severe deprivation and precarity with an approach that exuded care for the well-being, both visceral and material, of those living with food scarcity and precarity. They prioritised meeting the differing needs of individuals, reintroducing 'good food' that offered sensory and visceral benefits and focused not only on addressing scarcity but also on ensuring, as far as possible, the familiarity, pleasure, choice, comfort and enjoyment of eating.

Finally, I explore how these practices also supported carers' own emotional wellbeing during the uncertainty surrounding lockdown events, forging reciprocal, affective forms of mutuality. Given this, I conceptualise these relationships of care as *food-aid mutualism*: relational, visceral forms of caring foodwork that differs from top-down charity yet remain entangled with the politics of austerity. This concept extends existing work on mutual aid, solidarity, and affective labour by foregrounding reciprocal affective nourishment as a political relation of care that both challenges and reproduces inequality. To conclude, I argue that geographers can draw valuable insights from this foodwork to reimagine food-aid beyond the standard neoliberal foodbank model which has normalised the deprivation of the ongoing sensory, visceral pleasure from food for those who are poor. The care-based, personalised, compassionate approaches observed in Manchester, grounded in collective care and mutualism, offer a radical transformative alternative to neoliberal food-aid logics currently feeding so many of the hungry across the Global North.

2. Conceptualising care-full foodscapes

This review begins by exploring the development of the visceral framework in food geographies, the subsequent work it inspired, and its relevance for understanding socio-political challenges such as food poverty. It then turns to scholarship on mutual aid and care, which examines how communities mobilise to meet needs and sustain life amid the withdrawal of state support. This review will demonstrate how these literatures approach food geographies from distinct but complementary perspectives. To illustrate, the visceral politics framework centres how sensory and emotional experiences of eating such as pleasure, disgust, familiarity, anxiety and comfort are politically produced and unequally distributed (Hayes-Conroy and Hayes-Conroy, 2008). This framework can therefore help examine the embodied consequences or in harsher terms the visceral violence of austerity (Goodman, 2016; Strong, 2023). Mutual aid and care scholarship on the other hand foregrounds reciprocity, solidarity and collective organising in the redistribution of resources. Bringing these perspectives together provides a lens to explore how foodwork operates as a site where embodied and affective practices of care both sustain and emerge from solidarities that are politically meaningful yet can unevenly burden women, migrants and low-income communities to shoulder the responsibilities.

2.1. The visceralities of food and hunger

The relationship between care and food has been central to critical geographical scholarship (see for example – Firth, 2022a; Puig de la Bellacasa, 2015; Carolan, 2015; Beacham and Willatt, 2020; Cloke et al,

2020). Feminist geographers have explored how the emotional, sensory, and visceral nature of food connects to caregiving. Others have gone on to argue that the emotional and relational aspects of food can shape and be shaped by societal and political challenges such as food poverty (Cloke et al 2020; Strong, 2023), migration (Longhurst et al., 2009), and sustainability (Carolan, 2015).

In their work on taking back taste, Allison and Jessica Hayes-Conroy (2008) introduced the concept of 'visceral politics' to food geography. For the authors, taking back taste means "a daily project of illuminating the mechanisms through which power surrounds and penetrates the human relationship with food" (Hayes-Conroy and Hayes-Conroy 2008, p, 469). This involves considerations of both the power dynamics embedded throughout food discourses, as well as "in one's own internal bodily processing – how bodies with minds ambiguously relate to food regimes" (Hayes-Conroy and Hayes-Conroy 2008, p.469). In this work, the authors emphasise the significant role that visceral experiences have in shaping how we relate to food and how taste, smell, emotion and memory inform our food choices and construct food politics. This emphasis on power and bodily experience highlights the political potential of the visceral, illustrating how food goes beyond the material to become political; this is reflected in the economic inequalities, gendered and racialised hierarchies and forms of resistance materially negotiated through visceral food politics to determine who can eat, what food choices they have, and who prepares it (Hayes-Conroy and Hayes-Conroy, 2008; Longhurst et al., 2009; Cloke et al., 2020; Strong, 2023).

Building on these insights, scholars have linked the visceral politics of eating to broader societal challenges such as climate change, food insecurity and energy poverty. Carolan (2015) argues that these could be addressed through alternative care ecologies that consider the visceral dimensions of eating, or what they term feeling sustainability, where the material and affective dimensions of care converge. Feeling sustainability involves returning to the "tastes, cares, textures and practices" (Carolan, 2015, p.1) that have been lost through the industrial processing of our foods, and food poverty that disconnects people from the sensory and visceral pleasures of food (Strong, 2023). Through their work on the foodwork of migrant women in Aotearoa New Zealand, Longhurst et al (2009, p, 333) found that exploring the visceral dimensions of food and eating can provide insight into one's "emotional and affective relations with place". They found that the preparing, consuming and sharing of traditional and familiar foods empowered participants to sustain cultural bonds and traditions through their taste, smell, and visual senses. Together, this research establishes that affect and embodiment are not only personal but political, enabling us to engage with how social inequalities are lived and felt through food, and how people's sensory and emotional encounters with food matter materially to their wellbeing. Building on this, the visceral framework can also illuminate how affective and sensory experiences in spaces of food poverty such as foodbanks and low-income households reveal the ways care and deprivation are materially lived.

As food poverty has increased across Europe due to austerity measures (Cloke et al., 2020; Hall, 2022; Strong, 2022), research has begun exploring the embodied food experiences of those who depend on charitable food provision. In the UK, Strong (2023) undertook an autocorporeal method of consuming a food bank diet for 30 days, documenting how the diet affected him both physically and mentally. The lack of variety and choice meant he had to consume foods with unfamiliar textures and tastes, inducing discomfort that made food hard to eat and swallow even when hungry. These embodied reactions are not only sensory; they reveal how austerity policies materialise through the body, politicising hunger as an embodied experience of inequality. Yet, Strong acknowledged his privilege in consuming the diet without simultaneously navigating energy poverty, limited cooking facilities, or foodbank referral systems i.e. broader, politically induced burdens which people in poverty must navigate daily, which in turn shape what and how they eat. Strong (2023) argues, taste cannot be reduced to the items in food parcels but is "emergent in the changing relations between people and places, structures and senses, bodies and worlds. Taste is not just a product of the body and society, then: it is also formative of these relations" (Strong, 2023, p.465). For those in food poverty, the relationship with taste reflects socio-economic status, lack of agency, and precarious access to a narrow range of food options and fresh food.

As demonstrated by Strong, a visceral approach to food provides useful lens to examine the deep-rooted inequalities in foodscapes. Similarly, Goodman (2016) reflects on the visceral turn in food geographies, which he traces through the Hayes-Conroy's work on the embodied experience of food, and the (re)materialisation of food explored by scholars like Bennett (2020), Mol (2008), and Probyn (2011). While this concept has been applied to research on food-society relationalities within predominantly middle-class movements like Slow Food Movement, Goodman (2016, page 3) argues that the framework should also be applied to:

> "[p]rovide insight into the visceral violence of hunger and deprivation as well as the lower-level stress caused by the inability to buy the 'right' kind of 'good' food for one's family. In this, a visceral approach to food is well positioned to tell us the deeply personal and troubling stories of the continuing inequalities across the foodscape".

Reading viscerality in this way positions it as a framework that exposes how structural violence and deprivation becomes embedded in everyday acts of eating, and how such embodied experiences can become politically charged.

As Strong's work demonstrates, Goodman's concerns are as relevant now as ever. The rising costs of food and energy are making eating and cooking unaffordable for many, forcing people to change their diets and tastes (May et al., 2020). Today, the working poor are increasingly being pushed below the official poverty line and turning to foodbanks and other forms of food access to stave off hunger and uncertainty (Berglund and Kristjansdottir, 2024). Food and eating have thus become deeply political sites where practices of care and mutual aid increasingly emerge (Reese and Johnson, 2022). As Goodman (2016) argues, it is essential to interrogate the visceral and agential implications of such cruel socio-economic deprivation on the bodies and minds of those in poverty. While the visceral politics of food has begun to engage with how deprivation is lived and felt, attention is required regarding how these embodied and affective relations intersect with practices of care and mutual aid, a connection this paper explores.

2.2. *Care in a neoliberal state*

The UK entered the Covid-19 pandemic with much of the population living in states of precarity and vulnerability (Maddrell et al., 2023; Mould et al., 2022a; Mould et al., 2022b). This was exacerbated by an inadequate social infrastructure neglected through the historic dismantling of the welfare state and decades of austerity-driven funding cuts to "health care, welfare, disability support, education, social and childcare, and social housing" (Hall, 2020, p, 300), community support spaces such as breakfast clubs (Badger et al., 2022), and the privatisation of care related infrastructures (Lawson, 2007; Power et al, 2023; Strauss, 2024). Aptly capturing this, Britian has become a 'food bank nation' (Brown, 2024; Mould et al., 2022b) reflecting the growing reliance on foodbanks and the normalisation of charitable aid for a large proportion of the poor and working poor (Garthwaite et al., 2015; Garthwaite, 2016).

As societal welfare is increasingly neglected as a core government responsibility, care responsibilities have shifted from central government to underfunded local authorities and communities (Power et al., 2023). A key concern now is who will take on caring responsibilities for vulnerable groups during times of crises such as economic recessions, disasters, and pandemics, and what that will it look like (Spade, 2020; Alam and Houston, 2020; Williams et al., 2024). For Spade (2020), a transition to collective care and mutual aid strategies is essential to build alternative infrastructures to support vulnerable communities in future

crises. Forms of collective care, mutual aid and reciprocity were essential during the pandemic, as neoliberal government's failure to respond, underscored the critical role of community responses and mutual aid groups in meeting the unmet needs of vulnerable, anxious and hungry people (Spade, 2020; Mould et al.,2022a; Williams et al., 2024).

The dependence on non-institutional care has also deepened longstanding gendered and racialised inequalities. Much of the voluntary and community response depended on the unpaid labour of women, who filled the gaps left by the state to provide food and care for marginalised urban lives (Lombardozzi, 2023). Across cities globally, Covid-19 responses intensified the spatial and temporal burdens of social reproduction, as restrictions forced paid and unpaid care work back into the home, disproportionately affecting women and racialised groups (Razavi et al., 2023; Lopez and Neely, 2021). In the UK, voluntary work in charity organisations reproduced similar hierarchies as the majority of their Covid-19 volunteers were found to be white, professional women, reflecting the historical positioning of women's charitable labour as an extension of domestic caregiving (Mould et al., 2022a, citing Harris and Bridgen, 2012). Such dynamics reveal how contemporary practices of care, even within collective and voluntary settings, remain entangled with unequal histories of gendered and racialised responsibility (Mould et al., 2022a). This raises questions about the politics of everyday, non-institutional care (Alam and Houston, 2020) and how these emergent forms of care and solidarity may both reproduce and challenge inequalities, thereby highlighting the need for a more critical politics of care.

Anarchist geographers have documented and theorised the collective care, activisms and solidarities forged during the pandemic (Preston and Firth, 2020; Firth, 2022b; Mould et al., 2022a; Mould et al., 2022b; Springer, 2020), including mutual aid groups and improvised solidarities from furloughed workers and volunteers providing adequate food and other material resources (Reese and Johnson, 2022; Mould et al., 2022a). Drawing upon the work of Kropotkin (1902), who argued that cooperation among humans was more crucial for species evolution than competition (Gulick et al., 2020), Springer (2020) contends that it was collective action within communities, not the state, and certainly not capitalism that sustained us during the pandemic. Reese and Johnson (2022) emphasise that in times of crisis, both sentiments and practices of mutual aid arise, leading to care for one another through, for instance, the sharing of food and other resources between those who have, and those in need. Capitalist logics of competition and accumulation recede as communities navigate toward care, collectivity and reciprocity. Yet, as others have shown, community responses also expose persistent inequalities in who is able and expected to respond during a crisis. In the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, philanthropic work of celebrity chefs, not the state, provided much of the emergency food response in New Orleans (Firth, 2022b). Fifteen years later, during the pandemic, many chefs continued this philanthropic work through nonprofit foundations which had been established since the hurricane. However, Firth argues this has further entrenched precarity as responsibility for marginalized groups has shifted to nonprofit foundations, abdicating the state. Firth's research also explored how chefs, who are generally used to working in exploitative professional kitchens (Wylie, 2020; 2024), adapted to caring foodwork during crises. She found that some female chefs found lasting fulfilment in community foodwork and left professional kitchens. For many male chefs, philanthropy was a fulfilling way to provide care that is "non-threatening" for them "as it keeps hierarchies in place, maintaining racialized and gendered dynamics in the construction of "givers" and "receivers" (Firth, 2022b, p. 11).

Overall, whilst governments continue to allow social infrastructures to decay (Hall, 2022), collective community foodwork has played a crucial role in meeting the needs of marginalised groups, including low-income communities, working-class people, women, and people of colour left behind by the state (Firth, 2022b, p. 3). It is therefore crucial for geographers to engage with the complex geographies of collective care (Spade, 2020), relational agency, community self-help and self-organisation (White and Williams, 2017), as these grassroots responses reveal the spatial dimensions of inequality and offer alternative visions of development, solidarity, and care beyond the state and market. Whilst these accounts focus on the political and relational dimensions of collective care, attention is mostly on its social and organisational aspects rather than affective and embodied ones through which care is lived. Therefore, the political stakes of viscerality remain underexplored within the debates centred on mutual aid and collective care.

To conclude, by bringing these perspectives together, this review of literature explored what happens when the visceral affective lens of food geography is brought into dialogue with the relational political lens of mutual aid. In short, it provides a conceptual space to examine how embodied and affective food practices shape the politics of care and mutualism. In doing so, it establishes the framing for *food-aid mutualism*, a concept that foregrounds reciprocal affective nourishment as a political relation of care through which inequalities are both challenged and reproduced.

3. Researching care-full foodwork in Manchester

Manchester, England, provides an important context for examining the community food responses during the Covid-19 pandemic. Manchester is a city characterised by neoliberal urbanism (Rose, 2024) and sustained austerity, factors that have shaped the city's foodscape. This is reflected in its well-established food poverty infrastructure led by the third sector foodbanks, pantries, social supermarkets, and soup kitchens (Oncini, 2021). Many residents faced food poverty and overstretched support services during lockdown, and preliminary background research through social media and legacy media has signalled that women throughout the city had mobilised and played a role in the Covid-19 emergency food response. Therefore, this study explores the foodwork roles different communities of women undertook in Manchester's emergency Covid-19 food response.

This study used a qualitative multimethod approach which included semi-structured interviews, voluntary work with local food organisations, participant observations, fieldwork diaries and informal conversations. Participants were selected through both purposeful and snowball sampling techniques (Biernacki and Waldorf, 1981). Interview participants and the organisations I engaged with were initially selected based on predetermined characteristics such as the (in)formal role they played in tackling food poverty or in providing emergency food parcels during the pandemic. I then reached out to them via email or social media platforms. As my network began to develop, participants began to recommend people from their own networks and snowball sampling began.

I carried out 23 semi-structured interviews, 15 of which are directly quoted in this study. The participants were affiliated with informal grassroots groups, third sector organisations such as foodbanks or food-related social enterprises who provide meals to support those living in food poverty, or who contributed to the city's pandemic emergency food response. The interviews took place both face to face and online depending on the preference and availability of the participants. Duration ranged from 30 to 120 min, and the open-ended interview questions encompassed the following themes: scope of voluntary foodwork during the pandemic; motivations; short and long-term impacts of this work on them and their community. To facilitate anonymity, the participants chose their own pseudonym (Table 1). This also ensures that they can identify themselves in the study.

The participant observations and informal conversations were carried out from February 2023 to February 2024. I volunteered with an independent foodbank for six months and a social enterprise which carries out participatory foodwork with migrant communities. During the voluntary work I observed how these organisations and groups facilitate the needs of the food insecure and marginalised communities. I had informal conversations with volunteers and organisers regarding

Table 1
Participants.

Pseudonym	Role during pandemic	Background
Tallulah	Manager of foodbank (non-Trussell Trust)	Same role.
Janis	Lead volunteer of foodbank (non-Trussell Trust)	Same role.
Barbara	Part time volunteer at foodbank (non-Trussell Trust).	Same role.
Reverend Kirsty	Facilitated distribution of meals, food parcels, cooking equipment.	Reverend of local church.
Gladys	Volunteer at surplus food redistribution NGO.	Same role.
Rowan	Facilitated distribution of meals, food parcels, cooking equipment.	Food service industry.
Evelyn	Facilitated preparation and distribution of meals as part of a hospitality collective.	Chef.
Katherine	Facilitated preparation and distribution of meals as part of a hospitality collective.	Chef.
Xenia	Facilitated preparation and distribution of meals as part of a hospitality collective.	Chef.
Barbie	Facilitated preparation and distribution of meals as part of a hospitality collective.	Chef.
Stacey	Chef who aided local NGO's role in emergency food response.	Chef for an NGO.
K-Lo	Chef who aided local NGO's role in emergency food response.	Chef for an NGO.
Betty	NGO manager who organised the organisations' role in emergency food response.	Manager for NGO.
Dr Jasmine	Facilitated preparation and distribution of meals. Organised and taught batch cooking classes.	Medical doctor in disaster locations.
June	Facilitated preparation and distribution of meals.	Food service industry.

their work, their motivations and their experiences during the pandemic. Whilst volunteering at the foodbank, volunteers and staff would have lunch together and we would have informal conversations where I would ask questions, whilst some people would also spontaneously share their stories, knowing that I was interested in their experiences. Reflective fieldnotes were taken on my way home from the work. Given the sensitive and fast-paced nature of the work, and in some cases due to safeguarding issues of working with vulnerable people, I did not have access to my mobile phone to record notes or have time to write my reflections during my shift.

Foodwork in various material forms has been explored as a research method by geographers through participatory food practices such as cookalongs (Hall et al., 2020) and preparing and sharing meals with participants (Longhurst et al., 2009). Scholars such as Strong (2023) and Brady (2011) used their own bodies as the focal point of inquiry. Strong (2023, p.453) undertook an auto-corporeal method of following a food bank diet which allowed for "scrutinising one's embodied privileges." Brady (2011, p.321) developed an autoethnographic method called 'cooking as inquiry' to explore "the ways in which the embodied self is performed relationally through foodmaking". Actively participating in the work, rather than only gauging experiences through interviews, provided me with a gateway to witness first-hand how significant the foodwork of the community food carers has been for those who embody the "visceral violence of hunger and depravation" (Goodman, 2016, p.3) and the solidarity that has developed through their work.

4. Good food, care and austerity

4.1. Politicising emergency food provision

In the early days of the pandemic, the UK Government vowed to feed the vulnerable and the isolated. Manchester City Council set up an emergency food response, which heavily relied on pre-existing civil society networks, including local food banks, NGOs, and religious organisations, to distribute emergency food parcels (Oncini, 2021). Food bank manager (Tallulah) and a volunteer (Janis) criticised the Government's intervention due to thousands of low-quality food parcels being distributed to vulnerable people during lockdown. According to Tallulah, the funding from the City Council was "tokenistic", and for Janis the payments "were miniscule and didn't cover [the parcels of food and other items that were] going out". They stressed that for them it was important that the parcels contained 'good food' such as fruit and vegetables and essential items such as nappies as well as Easter eggs to ensure that children were not deprived of the treats other children in the community could enjoy: "Can you imagine £7.99 for three days food, how ridiculous is that […] on average it (cost us) £15.99 a person" (Tallulah). Both Tallulah and Janis supplemented the Council's funding with donations and funding from their organisation to make sure parcels contained enough 'good' quality food and other items to support both the material needs and dignity of those receiving them.

These experiences were echoed by Kirsty, a Reverend whose church, located in a deprived area of Manchester, became a makeshift foodbank during lockdown, delivering emergency meals. Kirsty realised that the Council's parcels were being reported as unfit for purpose and were not being eaten. It was "rubbish" food coming from a warehouse that people just "didn't want to eat". Similarly, Tallulah recalled seeing images of council parcels with out-of-date items or with perishables sitting on a warehouse floor "so there was no safeguarding" or care for quality or care for the receiver. Like Tallulah and Janis, Kirsty worked to ensure that her food parcels were of good quality by subsidising the council funding herself. To ensure the parcels met the personalised needs of the recipients, Kirsty would ask them "who have you got in your family? What is it you like to eat? What would you normally eat?" For her, it was also "really important that people got, you know, a really balanced diet, their fresh fruit and veg". Enquiring about access to cooking facilities was also essential:

> "Basically, we were asking "have you got cooker? Sometimes people say yeah, but it's not worked for 20 years. And then we got involved in supporting people to get new cookers" (Kirsty).

This attention to dialogue was an essential form of care. Understanding what food meant to different people, through asking questions and providing agency to the eater, allowed for the personalisation of the parcels, and in turn ensured 'good food' would reach those in need of nourishment. At the same time, Kirsty's account exposes the tensions in this care labour between the withdrawal of the welfare state and the expectation that communities can absorb caring responsibilities through appeals to moral responsibility and volunteerism (Spade, 2020). Thus, by personalising parcels to be both appealing and nourishing, and securing essential cooking equipment, Kirsty as well as Janis and Tallulah were attending to the visceral consequences of welfare retreat. This highlights the political stakes of viscerality, where the ability to cook, eat, and enjoy food, with dignity, which matters materially to people's wellbeing, are sites through which austerity is materially negotiated, and this is done through the unpaid labour of communities.

Other forms of community organising emerged in the city as many furloughed workers dedicated their time and labour to the needs of vulnerable people. Dr Jasmine was unable to continue her work abroad and having identified a care gap in her local community, she began to prepare homecooked, culturally appropriate meals from her home to be distributed locally. To maximise the impact of this foodwork, she taught other Muslim women in her community to prepare meals for up to 100 people. She built a network of over 200 women who took on tasks such as cooking, driving or distributing food. For Dr Jasmine, "it was about developing what we were doing that was working." She added, "even, you know… just cook with love."

The appeal of caring for others had a ripple effect through Dr Jasmine's community of women. For June, taking part in Dr Jasmine's cooking lessons led to her starting a community kitchen, which became a key source of support for local food banks and soup kitchens during the pandemic. For both June and Tallulah, it was essential that distributing

good food to families in need also encompassed culturally appropriate ingredients, such as Halal meat, alongside personalised, high-quality items like fresh fruits and vegetables. When there was a severe lack of Halal meals for Muslim foodbank users, June and Tallulah worked together to address the gap. In one instance, June was approached by Tallulah to provide meals for a single father with four daughters. He was struggling during Ramadan to cook after fasting, particularly because of his limited cooking skills. He worried that his youngest daughter, who was fasting for the first time, might not continue if "he is giving them terrible meals at the end of the 14-hour fast" (June). For June, this was about more than just providing food, it was about understanding who she was feeding, and how food matters to them. Her connection to the community enabled a more relational form of care: responsive to her community's needs and rooted in shared understanding of the significance of fasting. For June, this made the act of caring through food more meaningful and rewarding, particularly during times of religious significance such as Ramadan and Eid.

Whilst these forms of foodwork were motivated by care, they emerged in response to structurally produced hunger and the withdrawal of state welfare (Cloke et al., 2020; Hall, 2022; Strong, 2022). As a result, foodwork responses were driven disproportionately by the unpaid labour of women, in this case Muslim women, who replaced inadequate state infrastructures (Lombardozzi, 2023; Razavi et al., 2023; Mould et al., 2022a). Thus, this informal care infrastructure was at risk of reproduction of the very inequalities it was attending to. By absorbing the material and visceral consequences of welfare retreat through supporting foodbanks, supplying culturally appropriate meals through charitable provision, these women buffered the social fall-out of austerity. This made the Covid-19 crisis liveable while leaving its structural root causes intact, thereby tempering the transformative potential of this foodwork to challenge neoliberal food-aid logics.

4.2. Apple crumble and custard: the chefs enacting care through sensory and visceral nourishment

> "*We have had people in tears (after eating the food). The collective did some apple crumble and custard, and it reminded two of our service users of their grandparents. Food is emotional isn't it, it is memories, it is emotive*" (Tallulah).

As Strong (2023, p.462) has shown, those surviving on food bank parcels which prioritise "functionality over sensory diversity" are often deprived of choice or pleasure in the eating. The quote above from Tallulah epitomises how focusing on functionality may be compromising other essential dimensions of everyday eating such as the mental, emotional and visceral pleasures. The reality of foodbank users being moved to tears in response to receiving homecooked, familiar foods bring into question the normalisation of deprivation in foodbank societies. There is a need to consider the full extent to which people are being deprived mentally, physically, emotionally and viscerally through their austere and precarious diets. As Hayes-Conroy and Hayes-Conroy (2008, 2010) and Goodman (2016) have argued, memories, tastes and emotions which are associated with the visceral, shape the politics of eating, and the tears described in the quote above demonstrate how significantly those living in food poverty are being deprived of sensory pleasures from food.

The apple crumble had been supplied by a hospitality collective set up by professional chef Katherine during the first lockdown. She responded to people being moved to tears from her food:

> "Well, that's beautiful […] food is such an emotional thing […] it's key to survival, […] it's identity and, it's your place in the world […] and it's your personal memories […] it's nice to hear that it has that impact […] that's definitely the intention behind them".

The hospitality collective began when Katherine started repurposing food leftover from restaurants closing for lockdown into meals for homeless shelters and women's refuges. This quickly grew into a much larger solidarity-focused group, made up of chefs and restaurateurs from across the city who cooked meals and donated them to food poverty groups who would then distribute them. The collective's approach to emergency meals was centred around quality, pleasure, choice, fulfilment and nourishment. The chefs prepared meals for vulnerable people, without judgement and without overlaying them with specifically neoliberal ideals of deservedness (Reese and Johnson, 2022). The mental, emotional and visceral dimensions and benefits of eating were non-negotiable in the meals they provided, regardless of the socio-economic status of the eater.

Similarly, K-Lo an NGO chef who prepared meals for Manchester Council's emergency response for those who were food insecure or who were isolating, focused on preparing good food that would appeal to everyone's tastes and preferences, despite the limitation poised by the produce available to her. She recalled the "challenge" of repurposing food donated by suppliers of hotels and restaurants that had closed during the first lockdown. Meats such as "veal, prime steak, goose, duck" were donated, ingredients that, as K-Lo noted, the "average person doesn't eat." Aware that some vulnerable individuals lacked cooking facilities and were reliant on pre-prepared meals, K-Lo feared these unfamiliar foods might provoke feelings of discomfort or even disgust and be rejected. In response, she aimed to make the meals as visually appealing as possible. K-Lo and her colleagues worked tirelessly to "disguise" these meats within dishes that were more "recognisable" and "packed with nutrients." For K-Lo, nourishment involved engaging not only with the biological needs of the eater but also with their emotional and visceral relationships to food. As argued by Longhurst et al (2009, p.334), "paying attention to the visceral means paying attention to the senses – sight, sound, touch, smell and taste – which are a mechanism for visceral arousal." K-Lo's efforts to attend to eaters' memory, familiarity, and sensory experience show that the senses are also sites where inequalities are materially felt. As Ahmed (2013) reminds us, memories can trigger feelings, and this affective contact with the familiar or once-sensed shapes whether food is experienced as desirable or disgusting. By centring these visceral dimensions of eating, K-Lo's foodwork became a deeply political form of care. In contexts of deprivation, it sought to restore dignity and pleasure to food-aid, elements that institutional provision tend to strip away.

The collective demonstrated their care for, and attention to, the emotional and material realities shaping the eater's experience early in the pandemic, when they realised that some of the meals they prepared were not being eaten. They had been preparing "restauranty" meals with pork belly and salsify (a root vegetable) which were being rejected, whilst everyday items such as teabags and milk were being requested. Katherine and Evelyn, two highly regarded professional chefs in the city, recognised that there was no space for a chef's ego in this type of foodwork: "there's no ego anymore, just get over it straight away" (Evelyn). They adapted and made more "accessible" food (Katherine). Though nervous about raising negative feedback with the chefs donating their time and food, Katherine noted that they quickly understood the need to "stop doing the fancy stuff". They saw the bigger picture of caring and nourishing. It was not a platform to display "something that you (as a chef) might think is impressive", the focus became about preparing foods "that have that familiarity and sort of homely feel about [them]" (Katherine).

The humility of the chefs reveals their attempt to foster a form of non-hierarchical care. This resonates with notions of affective politics stemming from mutual aid scholarship. By letting go of their professional ego chefs move away from paternalistic distinctions between "helper" and "helped" (Preston and Firth, 2020). Their efforts to produce homely and recognisable food over restaurant standard food demonstrates how visceral attention becomes a means of practising solidarity rather than charity through their foodwork. This help demonstrates how solidarity is not only relational but also materially and viscerally felt through food itself.

Another challenge to providing 'good food' was access to kitchen spaces and cooking equipment for those in temporary accommodation with many families relying on kettles and microwaves. Katherine was surprised to learn that although the children had been surviving on "noodles, things that can be rehydrated, you know nothing fresh", that food was still very significant to them: it was something they got excited about and often talked about. The more Katherine learned about the challenges faced by those living in states of precarity and scarcity, the more motivated the collective became in providing microwave-friendly food without compromising taste or appearance.

Alongside familiarity and comfort, choice was another significant factor in the collective's approach. Conscious that a significant part of taking pleasure from food consists in the ability to select something in line with your "moods and desires" at a given time (Strong, 2023 p.462) they brought choice back into the everyday eating practices of the food insecure by ensuring a variety of meals were always on offer, including dietary needs such as vegan and halal, and non-spicy options for children. This supported dignified and pleasurable eating experiences and extended the meaning of food aid beyond functionality. By bringing back choice into the everyday food practices of those in temporary accommodation, the collective again actively challenged the paternalistic logics underpinning charitable food provision where it is presumed that people who need assistance will be satisfied with anything (May et al., 2020). This was further demonstrated by the quality charter that the collective designed and had signed by all of the chefs who they collaborate with. In the charter, they committed to using "really good ingredients and cooked with care […] all the attention that would go into a restaurant meal" (Katherine). According to Katherine "you should be able to eat that meal and feel like someone cares". Whilst volunteering at a foodbank I witnessed firsthand how the quality charter transformed the experience of service users. The selection of meals available encouraged service users to engage fully with the food as full-fledged eaters, deriving pleasure and exercising choice. Tallulah confirmed that the meals had transformed the foodbank experience, emphasising the "treat" of receiving restaurant standard food otherwise inaccessible to service users. Many of the service users "do not have a kitchen" or the "capacity" to prepare a fresh and "well-balanced" meals themselves, therefore some "take seven meals for the week" (Tallulah). For those with "chaotic" lives, these meals reduce everyday burdens.

Overall, both the collective and K-Lo reclaimed choice through food, on behalf of many vulnerable people who had it taken away through austerity driven food poverty, or through personal trauma such as domestic abuse. Their caring approach is far removed from many foodbanks which problematise choice and obscure this as "evidence that they cannot be in 'real need' (May et al., 2020, p.21). The foodwork of the participants demonstrated the nutritional, psychological, visceral and emotional benefits of dignified, caring food and food spaces and how these benefits can be realised in practice when care underpins the foodwork.

Overall, the relational and caring dynamics underpinning this foodwork has demonstrated the political stakes of viscerality within emergency food provision, highlighting that the sensory and affective dimensions of eating are bound up with power in ways that is shaping people's agency and dignity. This convergence of visceral nourishment, power and reciprocity will be further developed through the framing of food-aid mutualism in the section that follows.

4.3. Food-aid-mutualism: reciprocal foodwork in unprecedented times

Anarchist geographer Simon Springer identifies the pandemic as a moment of hope, grounded in the rise in reciprocal relationships of care (Springer, 2020). He characterises caring community responses as expressions of mutual aid. Unlike charity, mutual aid challenges hierarchical relationships by centring reciprocity, redistribution and community-led initiatives across institutional, social, economic, political and personal relationships (Mould et al.,2022a). Building on this, I use the term *food-aid mutualism* to conceptualise the forms of pandemic food provisioning where mutualism, relational reciprocity, and non-hierarchical care emerged. As the subsequent analysis will demonstrate, this framing distinguishes these practices from the one-sided, top-down paternalism often associated with institutional foodbanks (Garthwaite, 2017; de Souza, 2019).

While the recipients of the food-aid in Manchester couldn't reciprocate materially, an affective and visceral form of mutualism emerged. Lockdown brought intense emotional pressures, particularly for people living with scarcity and precarity and for Dr Jasmine, her cooking classes provided students with a space to support one another in navigating their own anxieties of isolation and health while learning:

> "Sometimes I just listened to the interaction between the students […] talking about their lives, one person advising another person, it was heartwarming to see".

Dr Jasmine recalled that one student recently diagnosed with cancer had chosen to attend the class rather than isolate; the class had become the "light at the end of the tunnel during those days for her". Dr Jasmine emphasised that the mutuality reverberated throughout the community as everyone tried to endure these uncertain times:

> "It improves [the students'] mental health to be part of a community with a common purpose, and that's to support our wider community, to be able to reduce food insecurity".

This foodwork helped some develop new connections with their wider community. June demonstrated the non-paternalistic nature of her foodwork as she described how it "meant a lot" to be able to support her people through her new community kitchen. Having previously lived in hostels and struggling with health issues when she lost her hospitality job during lockdown and was therefore "living off benefits", June insisted that she felt no different to those she supported. The foodwork "kept her afloat" during the pandemic, stabilising her mental health and inspiring future goals to start her own organisation.

As volunteers worked across the city in various food provision roles many discussed how this foodwork enabled them to avoid the psychological pressures of fear and anxiety which they associated with staying at home. These dynamics further complicate the helper/helped binaries commonly critiqued in mutual aid scholarship (i.e. Preston and Firth, 2020). The volunteers expressed how the foodwork which alleviated food burdens also helped them cope with potential risks to their mental health in the face of uncertainty and reduced spatial mobility. Rowan who worked for a local NGO captured this aptly:

> "Every day I was out, going to places and doing things […] whereas everyone else that I knew was just stuck at home and just losing their minds".

Gladys, a volunteer at a food redistribution centre, who was 70 at the time, described a similar fear of what prolonged isolation would do to her mental health: "I really, really did not want to be at home […] that really, really didn't appeal." Similarly, chef Evelyn echoed these sentiments, that the voluntary foodwork was something to "focus on" whilst people were at home "losing their minds". Evelyn also felt motivated by the sense of "camaraderie" around volunteering.

Moreover, for the chefs, voluntary work opened possibilities to forge new food-related connections through care and community building. According to Katherine the hospitality collective forged a community for the chefs who were quite isolated pre-Covid: they were too busy to make connections in the industry or even spend time with their families as they were in their "own little silo". Mutuality helped the chefs forge meaningful connections:

> "Obviously it's a very natural human sort of instinct to want to be connected to others, like we are herd animals aren't we and that connection with the wider community, I think, has been really

important for [the chefs] doing something nice, but also I think it's the connection as well" (Katherine).

Head chef Barbie who is part of the hospitality collective explained that cooking together can bring people closer, and preparing the meals to donate often doubles as a "team bonding" exercise in her kitchen, especially helpful when team dynamics are challenging:

"It's really good, not just for me. If two chefs aren't getting along, I say, okay guys, let's spend the day together in the kitchen. Then I get one to make the pasta, and the other to make the sauce. It becomes a bonding experience."

Barbie's philosophy is that being a chef is inherently about giving. She witnessed this when her team took part in a fundraising event for the collective and were energised by it. They described the experience as "incredible" and were eager to volunteer more. In Evelyn's case, she gained fresh perspective on being a chef: "You can cook and do a good thing; you don't have to cook just because someone paid you". She reflected on being a full-time head chef as having "no time to do anything else or to help anyone", focusing purely on "inputs and outputs," such as winning awards. The voluntary foodwork experience motivated her to pursue a different food career outside of professional kitchens, something she would not have imagined pre-Covid. For many chefs, then, the emotional fulfilment derived from care-based foodwork reflects a shift from professionalised, hierarchical foodwork toward foodwork focused on community relations and nourishment. The pandemic offered a rare moment in which these alternative food relations became not only visible but viable.

Together, these examples demonstrate that mutualism was forged during these times through the practise of foodwork, but not as a top-down, helpers' high notion of charity, but as a shared moment of sustaining the precarity, uncertainty and emotional pressures that the Covid-19 pandemic presented, particularly in spaces where formal care infrastructure was absent. It is however important to acknowledge that these reciprocal affective benefits are intertwined with political tensions. As mutual aid scholars warn, community care during crises sits in an ambivalent political space, vulnerable to neoliberal co-optation as volunteers and local networks absorb responsibilities that the state has withdrawn from (Spade, 2020; Preston and Firth, 2020; Mould et al.,2022a).

5. The political stakes of mutualism and viscerality in emergency food provision

This paper has examined how community food carers in Manchester enacted forms of care during the Covid-19 pandemic that foregrounded the sensory and visceral benefits of eating by focusing not only on addressing scarcity but also on familiarity, pleasure and choice. Bringing the visceral food geographies scholarship (see for example Strong, 2022; Strong, 2023; Hayes-Conroy and Hayes-Conroy, 2008; Longhurst et al., 2009) into discussion with mutual aid and critical care scholarship (see for example Preston and Firth, 2020; Spade, 2020; Mould et al., 2022; Razavi et al., 2023), has demonstrated how embodied, visceral dimensions of eating such as taste, memories, pleasure, disgust, and familiarity (Longhurst et al., 2009), are bound up with power, materially shaping people's agency, dignity and well-being, particularly for those who are living the material and visceral consequences of welfare retreat through foodbank diets.

The foodwork undertaken by the community carers prioritised the sensory and agential dimensions of food aid over functionality by personalising emergency food parcels, disguising unfamiliar foods and providing comforting meals such as apple crumble and custard. In the UK context, where food assistance is characterised by low-quality, depersonalised parcels (Strong, 2023) such attention to the visceral becomes a form of politicised care. As this foodwork demonstrated, compassion, solidarity and dignity can be at the forefront of food aid when the provider cares and the receiver's "humanity is not weighed against arbitrary measures of deservedness" (Reese and Johnson, 2022, p.39), a sentiment which reinforces the neoliberal ideologies of the 'worthy' and 'unworthy' poor (Garthwaite et al., 2015).

While the community food carers emphasised the emotional reciprocity of their foodwork as a means of keeping busy during lockdown, preserving their mental health during unprecedented times, as well as forging connections with their communities, their foodwork responses must also be critically examined within the neoliberal context which they are situated within. The affective benefits of the foodwork can't be understood as radical forms of solidarity during a crisis without consideration for the neoliberal ends which they serve. Through the perpetuating of exploited gendered and racialised unpaid labour to facilitate the austerity driven welfare retreat (Lombardozzi, 2023), the social bonds and solidarities enacted through this foodwork were converted into forms of "social capital" (Preston and Firth, 2020, p.63) which enabled people's survival and recovery from the Covid-19 crisis in the absence of state responsibility and action. This reflects how communities are behaviourally nudged into treating community care as their moral duty rather than a state responsibility (Preston and Firth, 2020), effectively self-soothing, self-organising, and sustaining one another in the absence of adequate welfare infrastructures. Acknowledging these tensions avoids romanticising reciprocal affect and obscuring the root cause driving the need for this community foodwork. Instead situates food-aid mutualism as a practice shaped simultaneously by solidarity, structural neglect, and the uneven burdens placed on communities during crisis.

It is in this space where solidarity, care and neoliberalism intersect that this paper develops the concept of food-aid mutualism. This concept captures food provisioning practices which reflect the ideologies of mutual aid such as reciprocity, relationality, and mutual benefits (Preston and Firth, 2020; Firth, 2022b; Mould et al., 2022a; Mould et al., 2022b; Springer, 2020), yet are not consciously grounded in radical or anti-capitalist sentiments. In Manchester, these relations emerged through the visceral and social dynamics of foodwork: the chefs practised a more caring form of foodwork, service users experienced dignity, pleasure and agency which are often denied in institutional food aid, and the food workers themselves gained meaningful, long-lasting social connection. I argue that food-aid mutualism unsettles simple distinctions between charity and solidarity where charity is paternalistic and solidarity as mutual, non-hierarchical support. It shows possibilities of how practices of feeding and eating can generate infrastructures of collective care that are simultaneously resistant and complicit. Resistance exists in the food workers refusal of the depersonalised logics of emergency food which prioritise "functionality over sensory diversity" (Strong, 2023, p.462). Complicity emerges from (invertedly) perpetuating society's over-reliance on unpaid gendered and racialised labour and community organising in the absence of adequate welfare provision (Mould et al., 2022, citing Harris and Bridgen, 2012; Razavi et al., 2023; Lombardozzi, 2023). Thus, the affective benefits of care cannot be dismissed as feel-good, helper's high responses nor assumed to signal radical solidarity. Rather, they reveal how sensory experience, emotional connection, and mutual recognition materially shape the politics of care.

To conclude, food-aid mutualism illustrates how reciprocal affective relations emerge through foodwork, even as these relations remain shaped by precarity associated with welfare retreat, uneven, gendered labour and the unprecedented conditions of the Covid-19 pandemic. As many Covid-19 food initiatives retreated post-pandemic, the participants in this study such as the hospitality collective, Dr Jasmines' network of women, and June's community kitchen continue to operate. Their persistence however reflects how their foodwork have become absorbed into wider austerity infrastructures, providing meals for foodbanks and charities that sustain, rather than disrupt or forge structural change. Manchester therefore speaks to broader UK dynamics, where grassroots food provision works to mitigate the long-term

consequences of austerity rather than forging a structural intervention. The findings call for reimagining food-aid practices in ways that recognise both the visceral and relational dimensions of nourishment while acknowledging the uneven burdens that underpin them. Whilst there is no easy fix to the visceral violence that occurs through food-aid in the UK, this research suggests that centring care, dignity and reciprocity can disrupt it. However, to avoid perpetuating the UK's over-reliance on unpaid gendered and racialised labour and community organising, such practices would require stable funding and policies that value relational and dignified foodwork.

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