Navigating Food Insecurity

An exploration of the structural violence of food insecurity within a neoliberal context

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Glossary

Food bank
An organisation that supplies food free of charge to people in need.

Food parcel
An emergency supply of food given out to those who come to a food bank. Typically, it has three days worth of food, including toiletries inside.

Food insecurity
‘A household-level economic and social condition of limited or uncertain access to adequate food’ (The Trussell Trust 2021).

Free School Meals
Meals provided for free at school for children whose parents are low-income or are entitled to certain benefits.

Holiday Hunger
The campaign which fights to end hunger during the holidays when the Free School Meals scheme is not available.

Service users
Individuals who come to the food bank support and use its service.

State benefits
The means-tested social security payment given out in the U.K.

Self-referral
An act of referring oneself to the food bank rather than being referred by a care professional.

The Trussell Trust
A Christian-based charity that hosts the largest network of food banks in the U.K.

Universal credit
See state benefits above.

Prologue

10th March 2021

It is Wednesday at the food bank, and Wednesdays as I will come to experience, are dynamic days. The main room, which proceeds the office at the entrance of the premises, is usually empty except for a few chairs and some volunteers moving through or doing light food sorting jobs. On Wednesdays, however, the space seems to reverberate with energy and chaos. The Food Share, an event at the community centre I am volunteering in, happens weekly on a Wednesday. It is one action of many within the city of Glasgow, Scotland, in which its community takes up the social needs of the people of the city as the neoliberal state releases its control of the welfare state (Rice 2007). The Food Share, as the day is called, is the busiest day at the food bank, and many volunteers come in to help. The volunteers receive, organise, and distribute food to the local community. The community centre has a paid subscription with FareShare, an organisation which collects surplus food from big chain supermarkets and distributes it to local charities and organisations to fight food wastage and food insecurity (FareShare n.d.). Each Wednesday, a set amount of food, fresh and long-life, comes to the community centre, and the volunteers sort it out and then make up bags for community members who arrive as customers. Around mid-morning, the minibus comes to the door, filled with bread, vegetables, fruit, and canned food. The volunteers and I, line up from the bus into the main room and pass food inside, where it gets stacked on tables and the floor. It varies from week to week what is received. However, certain foods are always there, sliced bread, meat, big bags of potatoes and onions, which we divide into smaller bags, fruit and vegetables and then many tinned cans. Often there are a few dairy products and juices, as well as ready meals. As we pass the food along between us, it is often commented on, "Ooh strawberries, they look good!", or "That's lots of bread this week."[1]. There is good energy and banter as the food is moved inside, ready to be sorted for distribution.

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[1] Fieldnotes, Participant Observation Notes, 10th March

Over the next few hours, we organise the food and set up the space. After this, neighbourhood members come to the door of the community centre to pay for a bag of food. They receive something of almost all the items, families who are halal get special halal meat, or if something is not wanted, it is left out. A few 'regular' people come every Wednesday. Clara, often with her granddaughter in hand, a team of mothers who come together and always ask for baby products they need, an older gentleman with a cane. Alongside this, some people come more irregularly or as a one-off, sometimes in groups of friends who seem to know the community centre but whom I have not become acquainted with, or else who seem a bit nervous and unsure, they pay for a bag and are not seen again in the following weeks.

In the U.K. there is a culture of shame and stigma surrounding the use of food banks (Garthwaite 2016). I often hear how the Food Share is a separate event from the food bank itself. The advertising for the Food Share focuses on fighting food waste and the people pay who come for the food that they receive compared to the free food available from the food bank. The volunteers and employees of the food bank hope that the shame and stigma which is commonplace is separate from the act of coming to the Food Share. A few regular customers have perhaps adopted this attitude for the Food Share. However, throughout my fieldwork at the community centre, I observed that the shame and stigma attached to using a food bank and being food insecure are also present at the Food Share. The feeling of failure surrounding using a charity that is socially understood to be for the 'needy' people in society puts a barrier up for those who could benefit by coming to the Food Share and having access to the food. Society understands the food bank and Food Share as a space that serves the 'most needy'. This stigma means that many feel unable to use it.

After some time, when the regular customers have come and gone, and the lull does not seem to end, the volunteers make bags for themselves. They move around, making up bags from the food around the room. Many volunteers make bags for their extended network as well. There are bags made for grandmas and brothers, friends, neighbours who are struggling and need help. As they are making these bags up, they often narrate for whom they are making them. "This is for my wee [small] Granny and her friend.," Gemma says as she goes around picking up different foods. People question whether someone is making a bag for their parent or neighbour that week. "Are you making one for your mum Isobel?"[2] Gemma checks. After the volunteers finish making their bags, the leftover food is free for everyone to take. The tables become emptied quickly as the volunteers pick and choose from the food they want. In the end, there is often meat leftover, large quantities of venison, which many of the volunteers declare is 'Bambi meat' and therefore will not touch, or else unusual fish, like squid that is difficult to cook. This food gets put aside to be taken to the homeless house that one of the volunteers has contact with, or else someone thinks of a friend or neighbour who will like the food.

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[2] Fieldnotes, Participant Observation Notes, 10th March

The volunteers and their extended network's access to the cheaper and free food at the Food Share is an opportunity for support with their sometimes-strained finances. This exchange happens away from the stigmatised act of coming to the foodbank as a service user and the Food Share as a customer. Instead of being reliant on charity, volunteers having worked are now accessing a perk of the job. The culture of individualism and self-responsibility (Brown 2005; Foucault 2010; Harvey 2007), fostered in the neoliberal British society, creates a social and internal barrier for the volunteers, where receiving help from the food bank is seen as a moment of failure. The use of charity is associated with 'needy' people who are unable to look after themselves. Volunteering in the food bank allows access to food but not within the charity dynamic of receiving without giving something back.

The first time I experienced this 'Wednesday chaos' as I named it in my mind, I was confused. The amount of food that the volunteers took home at the end seemed almost wrong. It was spare, and after having already made big bags for themselves and paid for it in the Food Share, I held a judgement that we should keep the food for the service users of the foodbank who would come for the following days. It was as the months went on and I got to know the people I worked with that I came to understand that there was not a line at the front door, with service users coming for support from the food bank on one side and volunteers gifting their time and energy on the other. Instead, many of the volunteers were people who needed support, or had others in their network who were struggling on low-income or state benefits who needed help. The charity model, which gives one-directional support, often holds feelings of stigma and shame (Valenzuela-Garcia et al. 2019). The volunteers navigated this by taking the food within a context of exchange, working at the food bank in exchange for access to cheaper and free food.

Chapter 1

An introduction

The prologue above presents a day in the community centre where I spent the entirety of my fieldwork, from February to April 2021. In it are the themes and concepts that I work on within this thesis. I will explore the dynamic of food insecurity using the lens of a food bank with the question of how do users of a food bank in Glasgow navigate food insecurity within a neoliberal context?

In the current climate, in which structural inequalities are exacerbated by the covid-19 pandemic, I found it important and relevant to research how individuals who are feeling the struggle, navigate the structural inequality they face in a society which tells them to do it alone.

Structure and debate

The conceptual work of this thesis is in three main chapters. The chapters correspond with three main themes I found during my fieldwork and three main theoretical concepts. The first chapter will explore the individual level and uses structural violence to understand food insecurity within the food bank and society. It explores how within the understanding of poverty in the food bank and British society, there is an understanding of some 'deserving' help and therefore a (un) conscious understanding of charitable help not being for others. The next chapter looks at the societal level and explores how neoliberalism and structural violence intertwine in the food bank and how these theories manifest in its users who have grown up in the British neoliberal context. These influences result in the volunteers of the foodbank feeling unable to ask for help when they need it. The last chapter builds upon these first two chapters and examines how the food bank,

as a charity within a neoliberal context, works as a place of gift exchange for its volunteers. The volunteers can get the support they need from the food bank by 'working' there in exchange for the food and support.

The main concepts I will work on within this thesis are neoliberalism, food insecurity as structural violence, and the concept of gift exchange within volunteering. I will now unpack these theories so as to build on them in the subsequent chapters.

The first two concepts, neoliberalism and structural violence are intertwined. As will become apparent in the coming pages, neoliberalism upholds the structural violence of food insecurity. I will specifically be using neoliberalism in a micro level, looking at how the economic principles are brought to the individual in society. As a political-economic theory, neoliberalism understands that the state is an institution that frees individuals to be entrepreneurial to best flourish (Harvey 2007). The theory sees individuals as self-directing and autonomous (Bondi 2005) and responsible for their position and circumstances. Therefore, Harvey (2007) explains that inherent competition is a critical factor in human relations. Individuals work against each other, and hard work is rewarded. This understanding shows how poverty and those dealing with poverty have 'lost' this competition. The implied meritocracy explains poverty as the circumstance of those who are not working hard enough to win. Monbiot (2016) details how this is an internalised ideology in the U.K., which is a country with a solid neoliberal hold. What a person has in life is a result of their work, and when one is left dispossessed, personal failures are to blame. This system keeps wealth at the top in the hands of a few whilst increasing the gap between those struggling and those less well off (Urciuoli 2010). This broader understanding of individualism and "responsibilisation" (Brown 2005; Foucault 2010; Harvey 2007) propagated in British neoliberal society has over time been learnt and internalised by individuals. Struggles and difficulties are a person's responsibility; they manage their own lives (Treanor 2005).

The users of the foodbank that I talked with, both service users and volunteers, spoke of needing support but there not being a place they felt they could get support. The idea of asking for help from a food bank felt in some way as though they had failed and had nowhere else to go, rather than as a support that was easily accessible without the attached feelings of shame and stigma. Ortner (2016, 52) argues that neoliberal governmental ideology focuses on 'the privatisation of many public goods and institutions; and the radical reduction of programs of social assistance for poor people'. Social care for the marginalised in society and those struggling, therefore falls to the third sector and charities. Those on low-income and state benefits are sidelined with state focus going elsewhere. As Cradock (2007, 162) highlights, a problem with the 'responsibilising' of individual citizens is that governments and institutions are therefore not responsible, which results in a distance of governments from their constituents (Larner 2000) and the problems that they face. As a result, poverty and food insecurity are at the feet of individuals and localised organisations supporting them, rather than the state. The conceptualisation of food insecurity as structural violence moves this blame away from individuals.

The issue of food insecurity is not a problem that revolves solely around individuals being unable to obtain sufficient and healthy food for themselves and their families (The Trussell Trust 2021). Instead, it is part of a broader structural issue in which individuals in the U.K. struggle to afford their basic needs, such as buying food, paying bills, and other necessities. Two of the three main reasons that The Trussell Trust found for individuals needing food banks in 2020-2021 were firstly, problems with state benefits that involved payment delays or insufficient amounts, and secondly, lack of informal or formal support available (The Trussell Trust 2021). The reasons for foodbank usage show the problem aligning with what Farmer (2004) and DeVerteuil (2015) theorise as structural violence; how the political and economic organisation of society means marginalised and vulnerable individuals suffer invisible and systematic harm and emotional distress. In this case, those on low-income and state benefits struggle to meet their basic needs due to the amount of money given in either low-wage jobs or state benefits in relation to the cost of living in the U.K., which results in food insecurity and psychological stress (Garthwaite 2016). Looking at the problem on the macro scale shows how institutions and the modern state can protect citizens and prevent this problem. However, they choose not to protect (Farmer 2004; DeVerteuil 2015). Banerjee et al. (2012, 360) building on the work of what Galtung (1996) theorises, explain that structural violence is 'the role that institutions and social practices play in preventing people from meeting their full potential'. The concept of structural violence is therefore not only direct actions, such as the government voting 'no' on the extension of the Free School Meals scheme for vulnerable families during the holidays (Stone 2020), but also the inaction of the state in enforcing the living wage calculated in the U.K. (GOV.UK. n.d. a). Galtung (1996) distinguishes structural violence from more personal violence by explaining that if one person were suffering from food insecurity, it would be violence on that individual being unable to live a healthy and whole life. However, when 10 per cent of households in the U.K. are food insecure (The Trussell Trust 2021), it is understood as a structural problem and, therefore, structural violence. The second aspect of food insecurity theorised as structural violence is the stigma behind it. The social practice of going to a food bank is stigmatised, this stigma prohibits people from getting support. The thoughts, feelings, and judgements surrounding going to the food bank are constructed and upheld by the people in Scottish society.

The context explained up until now shows the need for charities and organisations to do the social work that the state does not (Rice 2007; Valenzuela-Garcia et al. 2019; Doolan et al. 2019). The need for volunteering within the charity sector is understood and urged by politicians

as necessary (Valenzuela-Garcia et al. 2019), and has a long history in the U.K. (Kendall and Knapp 1996). The definition of volunteering is doing unpaid work willingly for the benefit of other individuals and organisations, or broader society, often within an organisation (Shure 1991, Cnaan et al. 1996, Komter 2005). This definition focuses on what volunteers' gift; their work for the benefit of others. Smith (1981) focuses on what is received in exchange for this work, which he explains is psychic benefits. This emphasis corresponds to Volunteer Scotland's definition, which emphasises community building, confidence building, and the social rewards that volunteering brings (Volunteer Scotland n.d.). These different definitions work together to paint the picture of volunteering being a process of gift exchange. Individuals gift their time and energy into working as a volunteer, and in exchange, they do not receive money as is typical for work, but instead psychic benefits.

The field

I conducted my fieldwork in Glasgow, Scotland. The city is renowned for its poverty rates, with an estimated 34 per cent of children living in poverty (Understanding Glasgow n.d.) and its collective response to this poverty. The city has a range of charities, projects, and initiatives to fight poverty and help the people experiencing it (Urban Roots n.d.).

Scotland is a country part of the United Kingdom. The divide of Scotland from their neighbour England has been present for centuries (Donnachie and Whatley 1992) and is still present today, evidenced by Scotland's fight for independence. Whilst the English government has control over matters involving immigration, foreign policy, and defence, the Scottish government keeps control of the rest (Scottish Government a. n.d.). Therefore, the Scottish government makes policies that directly influence food insecurity, and the English government makes separate ones. Despite Scotland having its own culture, both countries were subject to the roll-out of neoliberalism in the Thatcher era (Harvey 2007), which resulted in strong neoliberal influences throughout the U.K.. The divide between Scotland and England is sometimes murky. For this thesis, when I speak of neoliberal cultural influence, it spans across the U.K., political matters concerning policies or funding to fight food insecurity and poverty are, however, broadly contained within Scotland.

The research I conducted and my work in this thesis refers to the specific food bank where I volunteered. In the next chapter I will look in more detail at the food bank in question. Its internal structure and organisation were independent of the typical Trussell Trust food banks in the U.K., where more structure was applied to service users coming and receiving food. This thesis, its arguments and conclusions, do therefore not apply to all food banks dealing with food insecurity across Scotland or the U.K..

Covid-19

For most of my fieldwork, Scotland was in lockdown due to the pandemic caused by covid-19. Therefore only essential businesses were allowed to operate, and people were advised to stay at home. The food bank continued throughout all of the lockdowns in Scotland. However, its operation changed. Often social workers would come to collect the food parcels for service users, or else service users required deliveries because they were isolating and could not leave the house. Alongside this, when people did come to the food bank themselves, there was not a social atmosphere but rather a keen awareness of distance. This distance meant that my research was focused internally on the food bank rather than externally.

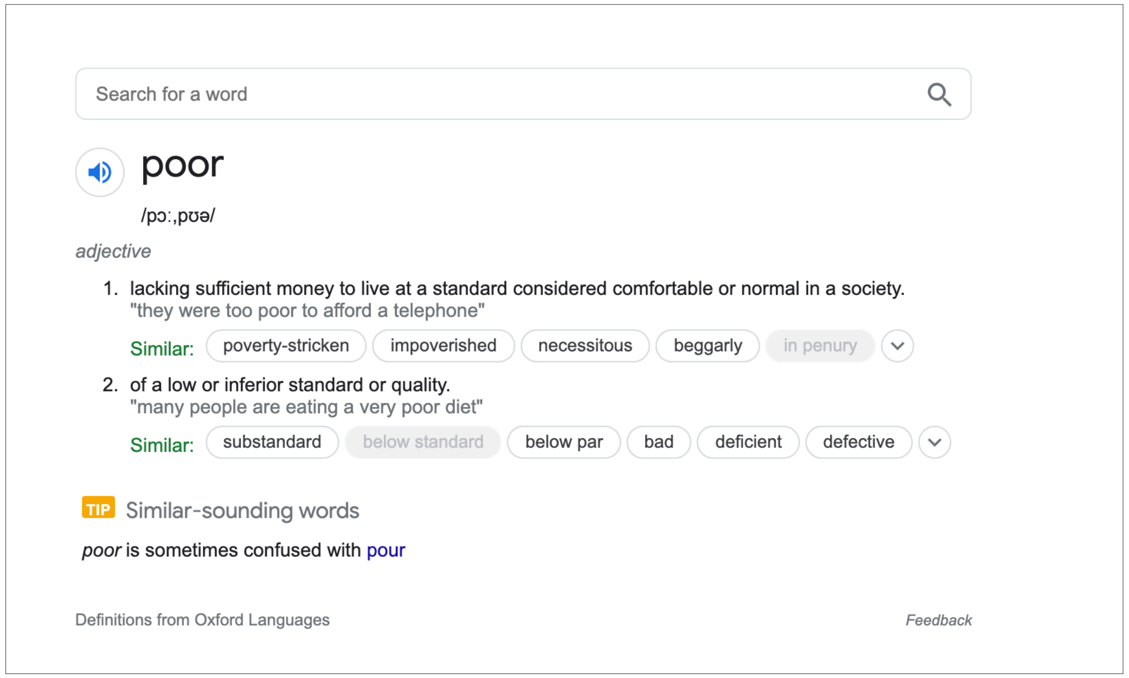
Methodology and operationalisation

When formulating my research topic around food insecurity, I was acutely aware of privilege in my lack of personal experience with the topic. I, therefore, chose to enter the topic so as to gain as much of an 'insider's' perspective (Glassier 1988, 35) as possible and take the emic perspective of the insider's interpretation without experiencing the phenomena of food insecurity myself. For me, this meant becoming a volunteer in a food bank. This position enabled me, as Ingold (2011) suggests, to study with the people working with the issue of food insecurity, rather than simply studying the lives of the people affected. I used ethnographic methods to understand the native point of view (Spradley 1979). One of the main methods that I engaged with was participant observation, 'through which one takes part in the daily activities, rituals, interactions, and events of a group of people as one of the means of learning the explicit and tacit aspects of their life routines and their culture' (DeWalt and DeWalt 2011, 19). This method allowed me to experience day-to-day interactions, tasks, situations, and to a certain extent, relationships that formed the life of volunteers at the food bank. The richness and quality of my time spent volunteering meant that I could hear and see aspects of the topic that I would not have from interviews alone. There were many things I saw and heard during the day, interactions between volunteers, the body language of the volunteers when working on service user-facing days in the holidays, and the actions of the volunteers on the days of the Food Share. Whilst volunteering, I was also able to engage in informal conversations (DeWalt and DeWalt 2011) that happened when sorting food, working, or drinking coffee. This method allowed for natural topics and interactions to take place that left out the more formal atmosphere of my interviews. The time I spent working with the other volunteers meant building rapport and relationships with them. Despite no formal gatekeeper (O'Reilly 2012, 114), I was aware of being accepted by the essential volunteers, Cat, Isobel, and Mairi. Once I had been able to build some relationships with all three, I was able to feel a part of the team. For both methods, I wrote detailed field notes each day. In the first weeks, I kept a separate diary for what felt like my emotional experience. As time went on, my notes became what Diphoorn refers to as a 'mosaic' (2016), where personal notes went in with my observational ones to allow for the interconnectedness of my ideas and emotions to come forth.

In the final month of my fieldwork, I conducted semi-structured interviews with the different volunteers (DeWalt and DeWalt 2011; O'Reilly 2012). I conducted twelve interviews in total with almost all the volunteers with whom I had regular contact. This method allowed me to triangulate the data that I had collected through participant observation and informal conversations. The semi-structured interviews allowed me to delve deeper into the more personal and sensitive questions that the group environment often made difficult. The shame associated with food insecurity meant these one-on-one moments were very valuable.

Positionality and ethics

There is a word in the English language that troubles me in its usage. 'Poor' as an adjective has the following definition when typed into google.



Search for a word

poor

/pɔː,pʊə/

adjective

1. lacking sufficient money to live at a standard considered comfortable or normal in a society.
   "they were too poor to afford a telephone"
   Similar: poverty-stricken | impoverished | necessitous | beggarly | in penury
2. of a low or inferior standard or quality.
   "many people are eating a very poor diet"
   Similar: substandard | below standard | below par | bad | deficient | defective

Similar-sounding words

poor is sometimes confused with pour

Definitions from Oxford Languages

Figure 1: *The definition of the word 'poor' from Google* [3]

Whilst used to describe people who live below the standard of a comfortable society, the term 'poor' simultaneously means inferiority and low standard. I believe these definitions are not separate, and instead, when the word 'poor' describes someone's socioeconomic status, it contains too this judgement of standard, which stigmatises and marginalises working-class people and people with lower socioeconomic status. For this reason, I have chosen not to use the word in this thesis, to consciously work to avoid the stigmatisation of the group of people with whom I was working.

DeWalt and DeWalt's (2011, 93) words on how all researchers and research are biased, echo my field experience. My research does not reflect the food bank and its interactions alone, but rather the food bank with me and myself as a part of it (DeWalt and DeWalt 2011; Jordan 2001). Various factors set me apart from those around me. I was English, surrounded by Scottish people, and higher educated where it was not so common. These two factors made the Scottish volunteers warier of me which came into focus at different times. The Scottish English divide mentioned above meant my Englishness was often commented or picked up on, and I think it kept an 'otherness' to me. Over time this diminished, and I believe had I stayed longer, it would have disappeared. My education level also seemed to keep some distance for some of the volunteers. It meant that often I was asked to do computer work rather than the sorting and parcel making of the other volunteers. I felt this work separation sometimes created a social division. I was not just one of the community members but was a student coming in for something more than just volunteering. In these instances, my characteristics and experiences seemed to 'inhibit' (Jordon 2001, 42) my goal of research and discovery. Over time as I worked with the volunteers, I built rapport and relationships (O'Reilly 2012), which made these factors less present.

With some of the volunteers, I built friendships. It was here that I felt the role of researcher become difficult. Struggles that one of the volunteers was going through felt both important for my research and essential as a friend. I kept a diary of this process for personal reflection and was also open about making notes at different points to remind others of my goal as a researcher.

There was one struggle in which I, as a person and as a researcher, felt in conflict. At different points in my fieldwork, I was aware of structural racism at the food bank, which manifested at points in various interactions. My ethics meant that I wanted to address the issue, but as a researcher, I did not want to damage relationships I had made. It was a complex area to navigate in that I did not feel I had the skills to address the problem. I, therefore, spoke with different managers about the issue to make them aware of what I experienced and observed.

My last point to mention is that to make sure everyone felt safe to speak freely on a sensitive and emotional topic; I decided to anonymise everyone in this thesis to respect their privacy (O'Reilly 2012). All research participants have pseudonyms, and I removed the name of the food bank.

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[3] https://www.google.com/search?q=poor&oq=poor&aqs=chrome.0.69i59j0i512l3j46i512l2j0i512l2j46i512j0i512.1197j0j7&sourceid=chrome&ie=UTF-8

Chapter 2

A food bank in Scotland

In this chapter, I will briefly contextualise my research by explaining the history and context of food banks in the U.K. and explain the food bank where I volunteered. Thus, this chapter will allow for the coming chapters to be more grounded and better understood.

History and context

The informal provision of food for those struggling with poverty and food insecurity is not new in the U.K.. In the past, where soup kitchens and community resources have filled a gap, in 2000, the first food bank was set up in the U.K. by The Trussell Trust, (The Trussell Trust n.d. a). Since then, the number of food banks has grown dramatically, becoming increasingly prevalent since the financial crash in 2008, with now over 2500 food banks across the nation (The Trussell Trust. b. n.d.). Food banks as a form of support have since been accepted and normalised.

The Trussell Trust is a Christian based charity that hosts the largest network of food banks in the U.K., with over half being a part of their network. To access their food banks, individuals need to have been referred by care professionals. The rest are independent food banks, and have similar but varying structures.

Today the use of food banks is normalised. The resource for those struggling with poverty is a necessary addition to British society. Austerity measures introduced by the government in 2010, saw attention brought to the welfare state to stabilise public deficits. This context meant cuts in the welfare budget for the past decade (Human Rights Watch 2019), which saw a rise in the rates of food poverty in the U.K.. The Human Rights Watch (2019) found that welfare for families and children saw a significant cut in public expenditure, as between 2010 and 2018, the budget fell by 44 per cent. The other important factor in the policies affecting food insecurity has been the change of the state benefits to the Universal Credit system, which sees individuals waiting up to five weeks for their first payment, creating pressure and often debt for people.

The food bank

The food bank where I conducted my fieldwork was organised differently from The Trussell Trust ones. In The Trussell Trust system, an individual needs a referral from a care professional. At this food bank, it was possible to self-refer. Individuals could come to the food bank in need, and receive food. “Never turn anyone away.”, Rahmi, one of the managers, said many times to other volunteers and me, “If someone comes to that door hungry, they get food.”[4]. The official system was that if someone had self-referred themselves once, they needed to be referred by someone else for the next time. However, the community aspect of the food bank meant I often observed different community members coming who were known to need support and therefore given a parcel. The independence of the food bank gave them flexibility in the way that they operated.

The community that made up the foodbank was multicultural and multiethnic. The ethnicity of service users and volunteers was different, with quite some British Pakistani individuals, as well as a strong base of asylum seekers who came from different ethnicities and cultures. The impact this made on my fieldwork was that the concept of neoliberalism that I focused on for British born interlocutors was relevant because of the strong context of neoliberalism in the U.K.. For interlocutors who were asylum seekers coming from outside of the U.K., I was unable to know the neoliberal influence in their different homelands and the scale of my research made this difficult.

A few managers were employees at the food bank, and the rest of the team were volunteers. I categorised the volunteers into two groups. The first were locals, almost all born in Scotland and volunteering for more extended periods; they were primarily middle-aged and volunteered alongside their jobs. They were almost all on low-income or state benefits. The second group were shorter-term volunteers and were almost all asylum seekers. The asylum seekers were all financially living off the state benefit allowance of £39.65 (GOV.UK n.d.) a week. For the asylum seekers, the reality was that many had come to the food bank first as service users, and if they had not, it was not far away from their financial situation. The social aspect of volunteering (Glasser 1988) was a big pull for all the volunteers, getting them out of the house during the lockdown and meeting other people.

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[4] Fieldnotes,Participant Observation Notes, 11th March 2021

In this chapter, I have contextualised food banks and their history in the U.K. I have looked more closely at the food bank where I conducted my fieldwork to show its structure and the participants of my research who worked and volunteered there.

Chapter 3

Who deserves food?

In the previous chapter, I showed the context and history of food banks in Scotland and explained the context of the food bank where I conducted my fieldwork.

This chapter will show the idea of people 'deserving' help within the Scottish context. First, I will explore how two groups of people, children, and asylum seekers, are understood within the food bank and broader society to need and 'deserve' help. I will then illustrate how the foodbank and Scottish society perpetuate the idea of this 'needy' group of people. This chapter will show how the conceptualisation of food insecurity as structural violence shows this categorisation of people as problematic. Finally, the chapter will show how the structural violence of food insecurity is ignored in Scottish society, leading to feelings of shame and stigma for those who need help and support at the foodbank.

The structural violence of food insecurity

I will first briefly conceptually explore how structural violence sheds light on the idea of people 'deserving' help, and how food insecurity ties in with it. As touched on in the introductory chapter earlier, the lens of the food bank shows how food insecurity is structural violence in two different ways. First, the reasons that people come to the food bank is evidence of the structural violence of food insecurity. These originate from the political and economic ordering of Scottish society (Farmer 2004; DeVerteuil 2015). Many service users have trouble with the state benefits system, either waiting for the first payment or problems with support. These problems lead to some finding it challenging to meet their needs when faced with Scotland's cost. These circumstances are upheld not by the individuals' choices of where they use their resources but is instead a question of the structure and system in Scottish society, which predetermines these conditions. These structural systems are therefore stopping these individuals from reaching their full potential (Galtung 1996). They are stuck in the cycle of poverty and cannot work their way out of it on their own.

The social practices surrounding the food bank also show what (Banerjee et al. 2012) mean by structural violence. This adds to the greater dynamic of food insecurity. The idea of people 'deserving' help and 'deserving' food is perpetuated in Scottish society and incorporated into mainstream culture and understanding. The food bank where I conducted my fieldwork reflects this dynamic, prioritising certain groups as needing the most help and attention. Therefore, the idea of 'deserving' food upholds the social practices of food banks, marginalising others who would otherwise need it. The concept of structural violence is powerful here to understand the forces outside of individuals control that are a part of the problem of what is preventing people from reaching their full potential. This use of structural violence to understand food insecurity removes the responsibility of the issue from the individual's shoulders. Instead, it places it at the feet of society as a socially constructed issue coming from the culture and the structure in place within society.

Is this for me?

26th March 2021

It is an overcast day, typical of a struggling spring in Glasgow and the second day of the holiday food project for children that we are running during the Easter holidays. Yesterday was a busy first day, and we were kept moving with many parents arriving. Today, some families are still on the list, but the atmosphere is calmer and more waiting around happens. The greyness and wind coming through do not help create a welcoming atmosphere, and mostly the few mums and dads who come, stand around with a bit of chit-chat but not too much buzz. I am talking to the different parents who come, collecting case studies for the food bank to get funding in later projects. A woman comes whom I would guess is in her late twenties. She has one daughter with her, who looks around 7 or 8, and an older woman who turns out to be her mother sat in the car. I give a chocolate bunny to the girl, who wanders the pavement we are all standing on as I start chatting with her mum. I ask her about the circumstances that brought her to us today. She explains that she has been struggling with bipolar disorder, stemming from a traumatic relationship with her children's father, and now she receives state benefits. However, the inconsistency of the money makes it difficult to live. Some weeks she gets enough money and some less money, which means that she often is left without enough to cover the basics of what she and her children need. Troubles with the benefits system are something I repeatedly hear over these project days from different parents and from individuals coming to the foodbank to self-refer themselves for help.

The woman's case shows a personal example of how Scotland structures prohibit people from reaching their potential (Galtung 1996). This single mother of two children has mental health issues and relies on state support, which ultimately does not support her and her family. The privatisation of previously state-run enterprises, a characteristic of neoliberalism (Harvey 2007), has meant that the cost of living is too much for those on low-income or state support to live. She experiences challenges and difficulties due to this insufficient support and not necessarily due to her actions in the situation.

After telling me this, the woman then describes how she reached out for welfare advice, who told her to google food banks in the local area. She seems indignant when she explains the little help there was, highlighting how people without internet access or who are not themselves 'computer minded' cannot navigate this problem. Again this demonstrates a welfare system that is not immediately accessible for all in need of help, meaning that those who need help are sometimes unable to access it. She explains that she sometimes feels bad when thinking about needing help and support, like the food hampers we are giving out today. Knowing she is not the worst off, and that some are more 'needy' than she, makes her feel guilty. She tells me, "But then I think to myself, no, you have children, you have mental health problems, and this is also for people like you"[5]. Her bags are finished and brought out to her, and I help her to load them into the boot of her mother's car. She and her child both get in, and they drive away.

The conversation with the woman highlighted different points and questions for me; first, her reflection about feeling unsure whether she qualified as 'needy' was something I heard many times during my fieldwork, both from service users of the food bank and volunteers. The reflection suggests there is a specific type of food bank user towards whom the help should be going. This social understanding builds up the mental barrier for those who need help but feel unsuitable to get it. This socially constructed barrier is structural violence, where the idea of some needing and deserving food more than others, shape the social practice of access to the food bank (Banerjee et al. 2012). Questions, therefore, arose for me of who is understood to deserve this help, whether the category exists, and how the narrative is created and sustained. Second, there did seem to be an understanding which I gathered from others I spoke to, which showed how the knowledge or thought of how others were struggling more than themselves became a barrier for reaching out for help or getting support. The thought of how some were struggling and destitute when they had something, created a border which put 'the needy' on one side, who were deserving of help because of their circumstances or belonging to a particular group. On the other side, were people who needed help but without a clear understanding of themselves as people who 'deserved' support. Their struggles were not bad enough to justify the assistance and help charities offered. However, they did feel themselves to be struggling and needing support of some sort. Therefore, the understanding came from my interactions with the people around me that a certain level of struggle warranted help and made them feel they 'deserved' it. The mother above, categorising herself as a mother and a sufferer from mental health issues, made her feel justified in receiving help. There was the feeling of being responsible for their circumstances, an idea I will unpack shortly from neoliberal ideology, which did not account for food insecurity being structural violence. This understanding highlighted the third point, which I searched an answer for during my fieldwork; what were the consequences of some deserving food and some feeling that they did not? The structural violence of food insecurity laid out above, shows the problem stemming not from the actions of the individual but from the systems (Farmer 2004; DeVerteuil 2015) in Scotland that impede individuals from their day-to-day existence and from the social practices which were within Scottish culture (Banerjee et al. 2012).

This context and dynamic of structural violence within the context of the food bank shows how those who were food insecure ultimately felt shame and stigma when needing support from a charity like the food bank. There was the perception that they were people who had failed somehow by ending up needing support from a place that was known to support the 'neediest'.

Who deserves food in Scottish society?

The first group I found in my fieldwork who were understood to be 'deserving' of help were children. Whenever I introduced my research topic to friends, family or inquiring acquaintances, a statistic I would bring out was that nine children in a classroom of thirty, live in poverty (CPAG n.d.) in the U.K.. The statistic was always greeted with first shock, and then horror. The shock, I believe, comes from the knowledge of the U.K. being one of the wealthiest countries in the world and the disbelief that such high rates of poverty can coexist alongside such wealth. The horror comes from the contrasting images of the innocence of children against the harshness of poverty.

To contextualise, in 2020 and 2021, the issue of child food insecurity and poverty became a focal point, highlighted, and brought to the foreground by the pandemic. It was primarily brought to the public's attention by Marcus Rashford, an English professional footballer, who

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[5] Fieldnotes, Participant Observation Notes, 6th April 2021

campaigned for the Free School Meals scheme to be extended throughout the holidays. The scheme allowed children from low-income households to receive lunch and, in some cases, breakfast for free at school, to support and lessen the pressure on families to provide food for all meals during the day. Rashford spoke publicly about experiencing food insecurity himself as a child, how he would sometimes fall asleep to avoid the feeling of hunger (The Guardian 2020). In the first summer of the pandemic, Rashford (2020) penned a letter to the British MPs asking them to consider extending the Free School Meal scheme. In it, he spoke about his mother having multiple jobs to support her family, and explained that despite her hard work and care, no matter how hard his mum worked, the system would never let them succeed. Families like his, who were struggling with poverty, would rarely be able to work themselves out of it; and were stuck in a never-ending cycle of poverty. Rashford used his platform to give a public and personal story to the issue of food insecurity, in which he focused on not the individual but the system surrounding it. The system was what prohibited (Galtung 1996) low-income and state-supported families from being able to look after themselves. Rashford pointed out that no matter how much one worked when living on a low-income, there would always be a struggle.

The public awareness and pressure from Rashford and his work put a flurry into projects and campaigns working with child poverty and food insecurity in the U.K., which had stayed for some time at the side-line of the public and political consciousness (Children's Commissioner 2021). The spark and energy Rashford has brought to the entrenched problem of food insecurity is heroic and commendable. However, the sombre reality is that it takes this flair of celebrity to bring attention to a problem that is otherwise side-lined and forgettable, whilst the failure of the government within the problem is often ignored.

The categorised innocence of children means that when they live in poverty, they fit very neatly into the grouping of 'the needy'. When Scottish society understands that they need help, they are immediately understood to deserve help. There is no question of what they have done to get themselves in such a situation or if there is something else they can do to help themselves. Children do not have control over their circumstances; their parents have control, so the children are therefore not responsible.

For adults, it is different. Monbiot (2016) delineates how within neoliberal society in the U.K., adults are understood to be held accountable for their decisions and, therefore, for their circumstances. Neoliberalism has fostered an environment where individuals constantly compete; the harder one works, the more successful one is. This understanding of personal accountability for one's position in life equates to the understanding that if a person is struggling with food insecurity, they must have done something wrong to be in that position. The reasoning for this judgement is that any failure they encounter will stem from their inability to work hard enough to avoid the problem. Their 'failure' is a result of the decisions and actions that they have made. A person's circumstances stem from their decisions and actions, or lack thereof. This state fostered understanding, coming to the foreground in the 1980s with Margaret Thatcher and her governmental push for neoliberalism, has since persevered in British culture. The problem with this focus on personal responsibility and competition (Harvey 2007, Cradock 2007) is that it upholds the narrative of individualism and avoids the structural reality of food insecurity. It focuses the problem on individuals and not the system around them; if a person is food insecure, they did something wrong, and the structural system around them is ignored (Farmer 2004; DeVerteuil 2015). Rashford says in his letter that his mother did work, she did take responsibility for her family and tried to provide for them by working several jobs, but the reality was that this was not enough. The wage she earned was too low, and the cost of living too high to support her family by herself. The set up of British society was prohibiting her from looking after herself (Galtung 1996; Banerjee et al. 2012).

Children are exempt from this neoliberal hierarchy. If the entrepreneurial are at the top (Harvey 2007), and those who need state help at the bottom, children, have not yet entered the hierarchical structure. They are not responsible for the poverty they are struggling with, as their parents' choices primarily determine their situation. Therefore, they are placed outside of the blame and into the category of being deserved of charitable help. They are in this category of being 'needy' through no fault of their own.

A manifestation and consequence of the idea and societal understanding of children being 'deserving' of help, was the funding of projects within the foodbank. Several funding sources granted money to the community centre during my time their; most of them came with the stipulation to carry out projects for children. The Scottish government gave grants for the oncoming year to fund food distribution for families with young children. The grants were in addition to the government's promise of extending the Free School Meals scheme during the holidays linked to the schools. Another source of income for projects came from Scottish Television who granted money to organise a similar project, creating food parcels for families with children during the Easter holidays. The final money that came in to support children was from the charity 'Cash for Kids'. They granted money to be distributed to children during the holidays so that low-income families with children could have vouchers or food parcels distributed during the holidays. The greater societal understanding of children 'deserving' help manifested in this monetary support for projects and initiatives aimed at helping children.

The categorisation of children as 'needy' and therefore 'deserving' was also present within the food bank. Volunteers and employees, myself included, were touched and empathetic to cases in which children were involved. There was a feeling of them being innocent, they were not yet responsible, as understood with neoliberal ideals, and were instead caught in something they had no control over.

The following is an excerpt from an interview I conducted with Maisie; it was a sentiment echoed in many similar conversations I had with volunteers over the months of my fieldwork.

> **Maisie:** *No, no. I didn't realise how bad it was until I started here and I was like, it's, it's really bad.*
>
> **Steph:** *And how do you see it? What moments make you think like, Oh god, that's*
>
> **Maisie:** *Erm, see, when I just started working here, and seeing at Christmas time when all the kids, getting the bags. And seeing everyone organising it, from like children, to babies, to like teenagers. It just shocked me, like and seeing how many bags are out there and that was just for the one day. And I was just like, Jesus Christ. I didn't realise how bad it was, like, I knew. Oh, yeah, there's poverty and like people are struggling, but since working here, it's been a massive eye-opener.*
>
> **Steph:** *I think I realised myself. I think it always hits me harder when I see its children involved.*
>
> **Maisie:** *Yeah, especially with the projects. When you see the kids, you give them a little tiny easter egg, and they're all laughing, and smiling. And the books. I'm like, you don't see that all the time, but when you do, it really hits home.*

These sentiments reflect the greater societal understanding of who was deserving of help in the food bank itself. The cases with children were understood as more severe and more urgent; this came from the feeling of the innocence of children and the lack of responsibility they had in their circumstances. It shows how the food bank was not an oasis operating outside of societies norms and cultures, but instead susceptible to the same influences of structural violence that it was engaged in fighting. The social ideas that upheld the reality of food insecurity, those of 'deserving', were present too, inside the food bank.

The parents received the food positively during the campaign. They left with a bag full of breakfast cereals and biscuits, pasta sauces and Haribo's, and they were always grateful for the support given. The problematisation of categorising children as being people who 'deserve' help, is that it does not look close enough at the problem. Child food insecurity is a symptom of the greater structural violence of poverty in the U.K.. By focusing on children and categorising them as 'deserving'; the focus is not given to the broader issue. The parents of the children are ignored

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[6] Interview Maisie, 26th April 2021

in this narrative. This focus on children needing help ignored the larger family around them and the wider problem of poverty which manifested itself in families being unable to find a way out of the poverty they experienced.

The second group of people whom I observed as being understood to 'deserve' help were asylum seekers.

> **Ashia:** *No, they need [money] from me [for] electric. And for the support like the food, they give me 150 [pounds]. I sometimes, I call social worker, I told her please, the electric is different. The homeless accommodation, they spend a lot..., believe me, I'm, I'm be honest with you, the whole winter, this winter they go. We just warm ourselves with the blanket and with the clothes. We don't open any electric heater. Because if I open it, like 20 pounds and 30 pounds.*
>
> **Steph:** *It's very expensive.*
>
> **Ashia:** *Like for two days, 20, 30, is, I told my kids is doesn't make sense. [What] we pay for the small electric. Leave it, we, we warm ourselves with a blanket. And always my son he dream, "Oh my god, mom. I need just warm my face." This [time] was too cold.*

This excerpt came from an interview with Ashia, a volunteer who cooked each day at the food bank. She was an asylum seeker, and came to Scotland with her two children from Iraq. Her husband and an older child were left behind in France when they understood that to get all of them over the channel into England would be too difficult. Ashia is warm, funny, and kind. She worked hard in the kitchen every day, cooking and pleasing everyone with what she made. After hearing I was a vegetarian, she and Mehrang, a community centre manager, decided she should make falafel as a special meal for me; she brought in her deep fryer from home for the meal. She came first to the food bank as a service user needing support and then offered herself to volunteer; each day, she cooked enough to feed the volunteers and then take food home for her children.

Ashia was one of two asylum seekers that I had close contact with at the food bank. She is a part of the second group of people who were understood to 'deserve' help; asylum seekers. This concept of 'deserving' help, applied to asylum seekers who came to the food bank as service users, and asylum seekers within the community centre who worked as volunteers. A large part of the volunteer group for the community centre were asylum seekers. As they were waiting for the decision on their asylum case, they were not allowed to work (GOV.UK. b. n.d.), and therefore had much free time during the pandemic and nowhere to go.

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[7] Interview Ashia, 8th April 2021

While asylum seekers wait for the decision on their case in Scotland, they get £39.63 (GOV UK. b. n.d.) per week; this money should be enough for food, clothes, and any additional needs, such as phone bills, transport, and toiletries. Lyons (2017) showed how many asylum seekers struggled to manage with this money; the needs of the individuals and the cost of living in the U.K. made the amount too little. Ashia verbalises their struggle above. The resource of money that she had to look after her family, was not enough to feed, clothe, and keep herself and her children warm. The trap asylum seekers are caught in when waiting on their case to be heard shows the violence inflicted by the state on vulnerable people in her position. They are stuck in a position with little money, often undesirable living spaces, and limited ways to help their position. Ashia fled from Iraq whilst fearing for her and her family's lives, she made a harrowing journey through different countries, again putting herself and her family in danger, and when received by the U.K., where she is seeking asylum, she meets inadequate support that leaves her and her family unable to live fully. The experience of asylum seekers in the U.K. is heavily affected by structural violence; the system that should protect and receive them, is at the same time prohibiting them from being able to live because their basic needs are not met (Galtung 1996; Banerjee et al. 2012).

There was an understanding from the community centre's management and some of the volunteers, that the asylum seekers were struggling and treated unfairly within the current asylum system in the U.K.. Because of this understanding, the management was very clear that the volunteers who were asylum seekers had access to the food that they needed from the food bank, and a free bag of food from the Food Share on Wednesdays. There was a clear moment when this categorisation of the asylum seekers as more 'deserving' of help and more 'needy' came into conflict for some of the other volunteers. One Wednesday at around midday, as we were sorting the food FareShare had delivered, someone asked if volunteers had to pay for bags at the Food Share. For the previous weeks, we had been putting food aside for the volunteers working at another premises of the community centre; it was food for roughly ten men who were all asylum seekers. It was also asked if the full money had to be paid if someone took only a few items. In response to the question Rahmi, one of the head managers, explained clearly that volunteers had to pay for their bags. "You guys get a discount for your bags, you pay £5 instead of £7.50.", she explained to all the volunteers in the room, "You always pay that money, no matter how much you take. Even if it's a few things, or if it's an entire bag, you always pay £5. And then at the end if there are things left over that would go to waste, you can take that stuff for free." [8]. Isobel, one of the volunteers, piped up "It isnae [is not] fair that they [the asylum seeker] get a free bag." she said "What about us? People here are struggling too, that's why we volunteer. I'm a single mum, and I also struggle. Some weeks are really hard, and I can really do with the help" [9]. Rahmi replied quite forcefully, "They are refugees, and they get £35 a week to live on". She looked over at Becca, one of the asylum seekers who volunteered at the food bank, for confirmation. "It's £35 a week you get right?"[10] Becca nodded. This clear line from Rahmi, of the volunteers getting extra support, came within the context of the volunteers at the second premises saving the community centre much money. The construction work the men were doing was unpaid, and it would have cost a fortune and maybe would not have been possible if they had been paid. The community centre's indebtedness, plays a part in the transaction. However, verbally, she accounted their access to the free food as being down to their status as asylum seekers, and their needing the support. Her clarity on the subject during this meeting rippled out in the following days and weeks, and the understanding of asylum seekers needing help was set and clear.

There was a clear difference in the perception of the asylum seekers within the food bank and the perception of asylum seekers generally in the wider U.K. society. Internally, there was the understanding that the asylum seekers were victims of structural violence. They came to the U.K. as vulnerable individuals and families seeking asylum, and were mistreated and neglected by the asylum system in the U.K., which meant they were unable to fully live their lives (Galtung 1996; Banerjee et al. 2012). Externally in British society, this understanding of the context in how asylum seekers are living is somewhat lost. The fight for Brexit in 2016 was focused mainly on the idea of 'immigrants' and 'foreigners' who were coming into the U.K. taking up resources and taking jobs (Reeves 2017). This negative shadow cast on immigration fell too on refugees and asylum seekers. They are portrayed as a 'burden' on society, carried by the 'good' working people in the U.K. (Reeves 2017). The reality of the structural violence that asylum seekers experience in the U.K. is not recognised; they are not yet seen as British citizens, and are not a genuine concern. In contrast to the case of children explored above, in which there was money and attention focused during the pandemic. The suffering of asylum seekers is largely ignored, with an 'othering' and victim-blaming mentality towards the group (Poynting and Briskman 2020). The two groups show how although both are victims of structural violence, their importance in the eyes of British society is different. The children's national identity creates an understanding of 'ours' in their struggle, whilst the otherness of the asylum seekers (Poynting and Briskman 2020) decreases the importance of the problem.

The categorisation of these two groups as clearly being 'needy' and 'deserving', means that others who are also victims of structural violence of food insecurity, do not identify themselves as needing support because they do not belong to these groups. If support is needed, there are

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[8] Fieldnotes, Participant Observation Notes, 7th April 2021

[9] Fieldnotes, Participant Observation Notes, 7th April 2021

[10] Fieldnotes, Participant Observation Notes, 7th April 2021

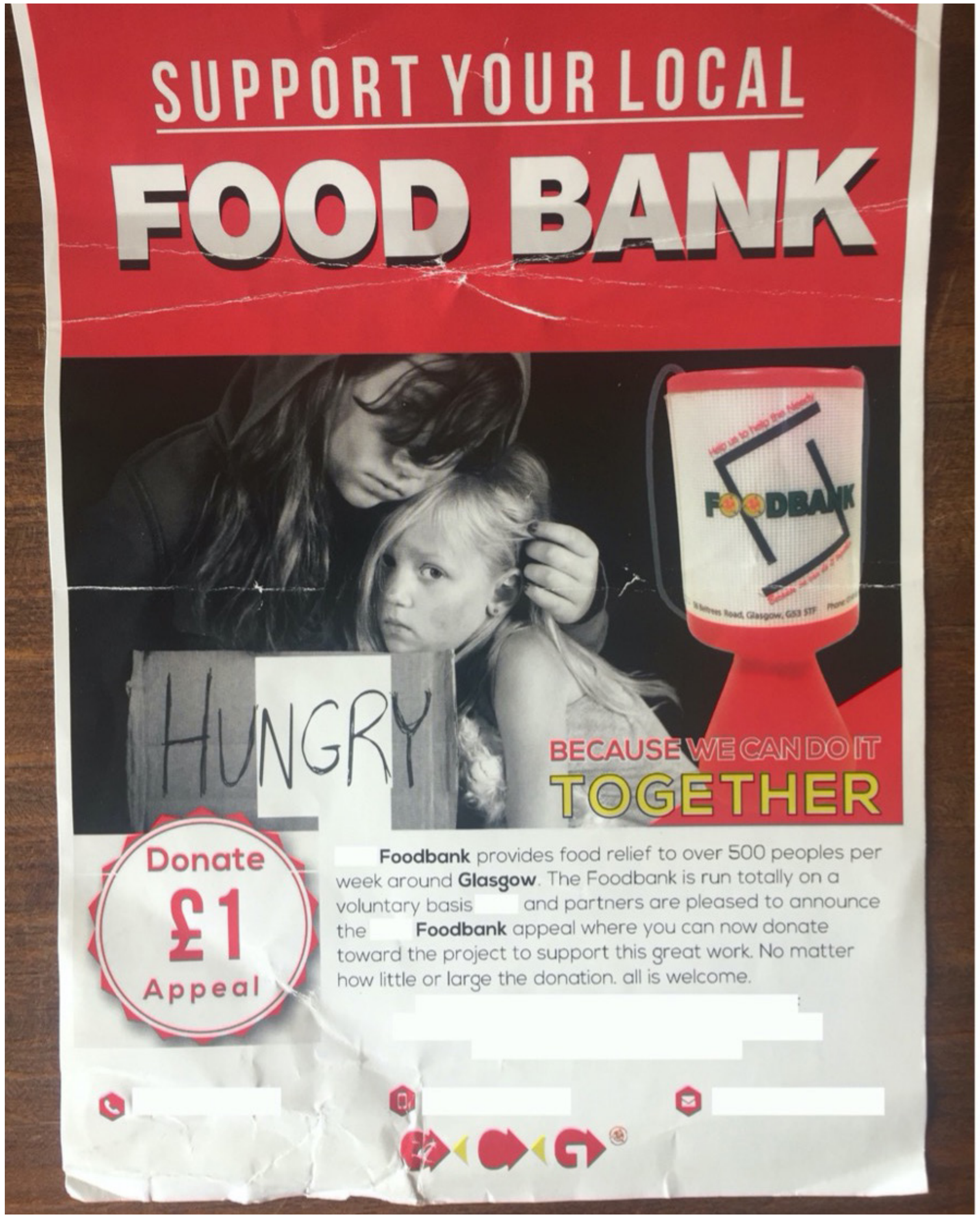
feelings of shame attached because they perceive themselves to have failed. The stigma comes from the portrayal of those who need food banks, who are shown as 'needy' and destitute.

The perpetuation of poverty

I will now go on to unpack the narrative of who is 'needy' and 'deserving' and show how this idea is maintained. When exploring the idea of who qualifies as 'needy', and the moral idea of whether someone is deserving help or not, Ferguson's (2013) term 'work membership' is helpful for analysis. Ferguson explains that work membership entails how one's access to society, and being recognised socially, comes through a job. Dickinson (2016) elaborates on this idea by explaining how this kind of membership creates social belonging in an industrial society. Work is identified as a virtue, and not working, being idle, is understood to be a vice (Valenzuela-Garcia et al. 2019). The groups explored above, asylum seekers and children, are both unable to work. For children, this fact excludes them from the moral assessment stated above. Their need for charitable support is not judged against the fact of them working or not. They are understood to need help, and as people unable to support themselves. This moral assessment is more complex for asylum seekers, and adults seeking support from the food bank. There is a clear moral assessment of people living and struggling with poverty in the U.K. through the media, which is closely linked to neoliberal responsibilism. McKendrick et al. (2008) discuss how non-news broadcasts rarely covered the issue of poverty in the U.K., and when they did, it was as Glaze (2021) did in The Mirror tabloid, to talk of the extreme cases, for example of people 'living in destitution'. The portrayal of poverty and 'the underclass' in television soaps, shows a world of violence and illegality (McKendrick et al. 2008), where when people are struggling with poverty, they turn to crime as an answer. This decision is often understood as a moral failure rather than an economic necessity. Alongside this, there is a sanitised portrayal of poverty in drama programs, where people living on low incomes were not seriously depicted, with the reality of not being able to afford essential items, like food or paying heating bills, not shown. This portrayal further stigmatises those who are on a low income, and struggling with poverty. McKendrick et al. (2008) found that there was a differentiation between 'us' and 'them' implicitly present. Even where the coverage of poverty was not negative, it leaned towards the narrative that people living in poverty 'lacked initiative, [were] unproductive, and a burden on 'us' (McKendrick et al. 2008, 39). This representation and portrayal adds to the collective understanding of who 'the needy' are. This portrayal was not something the group who needed support could resonate with during my fieldwork. This disconnect is in the opening vignette; the woman needed help but did not see herself as someone she recognised needing support from the food bank. Their understanding of themselves is different from what is shown in the media, which creates a disconnect between needing help and going to a place that supports 'the needy'.

This stigmatised portrayal of people struggling with poverty was echoed within the food bank itself. This theme was a critical struggle that I observed during my time at the food bank. There was a struggle of creating and distributing content when the intended audience was unclear. There was a difficultly in separating content and information intended for donors and organisations, from content intended for service users to show them it was a place for help.

On the following pages is a primary flyer for the organisation; on it, there was contact information and an appeal for donations and bank details.


SUPPORT YOUR LOCAL
FOOD BANK
HUNGRY
Help us to help the Needy
FOODBANK
BECAUSE WE CAN DO IT
TOGETHER
Donate
£1
Appeal

[redacted] **Foodbank** provides food relief to over 500 peoples per week around **Glasgow**. The Foodbank is run totally on a voluntary basis [redacted] and partners are pleased to announce the [redacted] **Foodbank** appeal where you can now donate toward the project to support this great work. No matter how little or large the donation. all is welcome.

[redacted]

[redacted] [redacted] [redacted]

Figure 2: *The front page of the flyer from the food bank.* [11]

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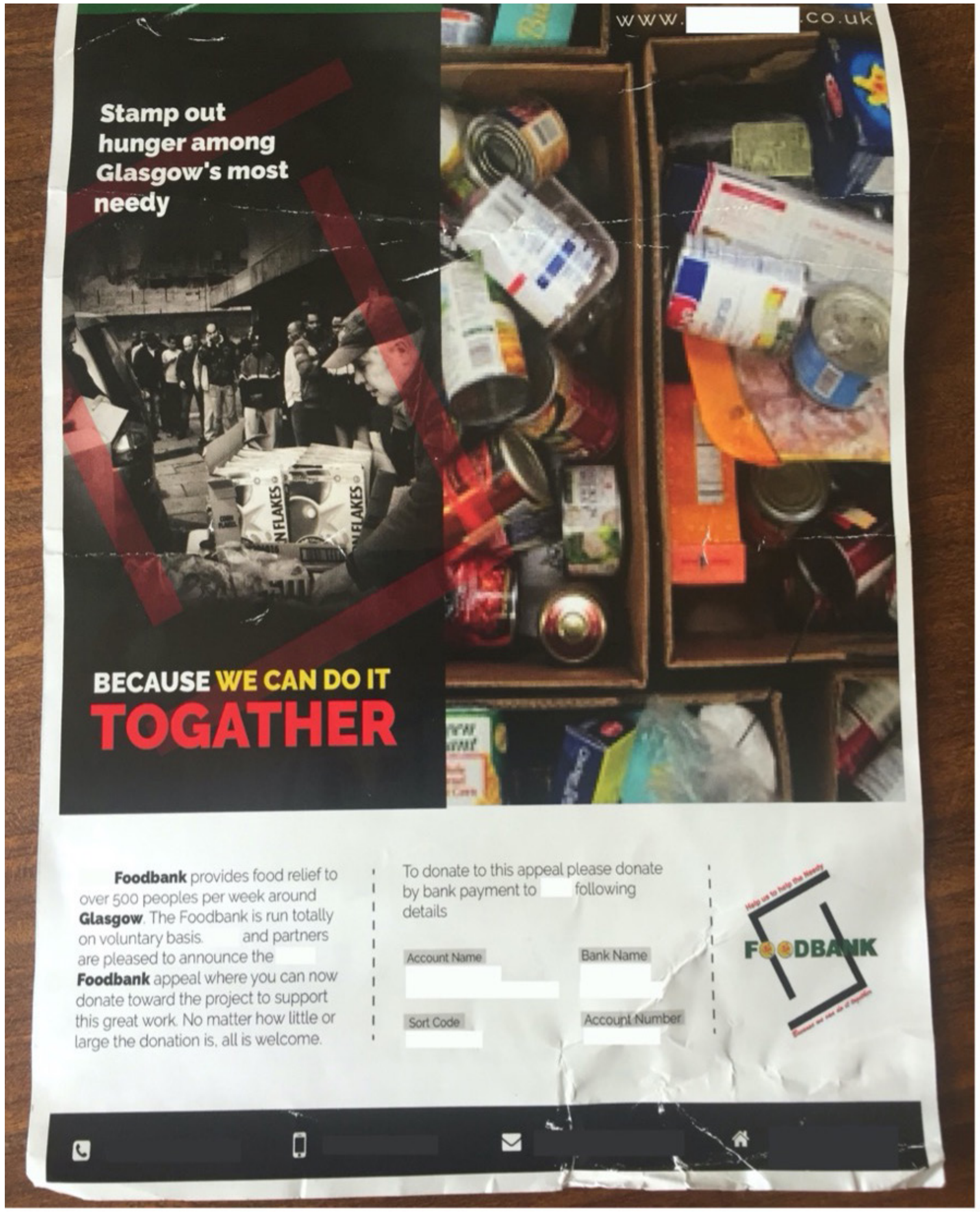
[11] The flyer was public from the food bank


www.[redacted].co.uk
Stamp out hunger among Glasgow's most needy
BECAUSE WE CAN DO IT
TOGATHER
Help us to help the Needy
FOODBANK

[redacted] **Foodbank** provides food relief to over 500 peoples per week around **Glasgow**. The Foodbank is run totally on voluntary basis. [redacted] and partners are pleased to announce the [redacted] **Foodbank** appeal where you can now donate toward the project to support this great work. No matter how little or large the donation is, all is welcome.

To donate to this appeal please donate by bank payment to [redacted] following details

Account Name [redacted]
Bank Name [redacted]
Sort Code [redacted]
Account Number [redacted]

[redacted] [redacted] [redacted] [redacted]

Figure 3: *The back page of the flyer from the food bank.* [12]

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[12] The flyer was public from the food bank

The image on the front (see Figure 2), with two young girls with dirt on their faces, plays into a problematic idea of how poverty looks. It shows poverty to look like begging on the street, with nothing, and no resources available to you. The reality is that many people are struggling with poverty in the U.K. caused by structural inequality. They are housed and even work, but their income level means they struggle to support themselves with their basic needs, such as food and bills.

Many of the volunteers at the food bank said that this image troubled them, that it was not a realistic image of what it was like to struggle to feed your children. Instead, it sensationalised poverty into something unidentifiable for those who were struggling and needed support. The cardboard sign with 'hungry' written on it, adds to this unrealistic portrayal. The image of the children was something unrelatable to many of the service users with children. They had children themselves, and sometimes need extra help from the food bank, but would never put their children in those circumstances. On the back (see Figure 3), there are two pictures, one with boxes of donated foods, and another, a black and white one, of a queue of people lining up for food. The black and white picture brings up the memory of poverty in the past, with 'the less fortunate' in Dickens novels struggling in the workhouse. The words 'stamp out hunger among Glasgow's most needy' would insinuate that these people on the flyer are the 'most needy'.

The flyer was a reference point for donations with the necessary information all in one place. The creator chose the pictures and words on the flyer to elicit an emotional response, and the wish to help from the viewer. The children on the front who are recognised of 'deserving', create sympathy for the viewers. Rozario (2003) notes that to avoid 'compassion fatigue' which people may experience when confronted with many images of suffering, charities wanting to encourage donations have begun showing poverty in a sensationalist way. With this sensationalist attitude, the flyer above misrepresented poverty for the users of the foodbank. Sensationalised poverty is capitalised upon to receive more donations. The food bank needed to receive donations and grants to run; therefore, this flyer was deemed necessary. It operated in a Scottish neoliberal society in which it was necessary to make money to continue their work. Their independence and lack of continuous governmental support, therefore, meant continuous fundraising and grant applications.

The flyer was also one of the primary resources handed out to service users and included in all food parcels. If someone came in wanting information, they were given the flyer after being orally explained the system. Therefore, the images and text on the flyer confronted the service users, which labelled them as 'needy' and likened them to people begging on the street. The parents I spoke to at the holiday food campaign for children did not seem to identify with this image. They were either on low-income or state benefits, and were struggling, but were not homeless and on the street. This representation of service users further stigmatised the act of going to a food bank. The social practice that Banerjee et al. (2012) theorised as structural violence is here visible in the social practice of going to the food bank. The stigma that surrounds using a food bank, prevents those who would need it from going.

The second blurring of lines that I observed between output meant for donors and service users, was during the Easter holiday food hamper campaign for children. The broader media and some reports frequently referred to the campaign as 'Holiday Hunger'. It had an intention to fight the problem of children being hungry during the holidays, when families would be struggling without the support of the Free School Meals scheme during term-time. The message sent out with this heading was of families and children in dire need, struggling and unable to cope during the holiday. The name 'Holiday Hunger' was originally not intended for service users at the food bank, and instead, something less stigmatising was wished for, which focused on providing lunches for children. However, the campaign which I participated in had the name 'Holiday Hunger'. This came up when contacting schools, some of whom used it to contact parents, and afterwards, one of the employees in charge of sharing content about the organisation from her Facebook used the name in different posts.

The name 'Holiday Hunger' carries the association of what Aileen, one of the volunteers, summed up as "it sounds like you cannae [cannot] feed your weans [children]."[13]. The name brings the association of not providing for your children, and of having failed as a parent. This emotion of shame and failure further adds to the social stigma of using a food bank, and perpetuates the association with the social practice of needing help with that of failure. Valenzuela-Garcia et al. (2019) point out the shame and stigma that can be felt by those receiving charity. This blurring of content produced for funders and donors but used for service users, both creates and maintains the stigma surrounding the food bank and being a service user.

The distribution of the food hampers for the holiday hamper program happened at two different locations. At one of the locations, I encountered service users who were aware of this popular portrayal of those in poverty and somehow moulded themselves to it, and at the other, I saw service users who did not have so much experience and therefore did not try to identify themselves within it.

One location was the community centre base, it had been there for nine years, and the parents that came to these days had often come to the community centre before, either to the foodbank, or for the children's holiday hamper program. When I talked with the parents who had come to us before, there was almost always an answer ready for the question I asked, of what circumstances had brought them to us today. "Aye, it's been a tough year." [14], many mothers explained to me as we talked about the difficulties of the pandemic. "With the kids at home, they just eat and eat and eat"[15] another exclaimed. Otherwise, they talked about the increase in bills that they had experienced "With my daughter at home, the electric bill has gone up so, much, with all the zoom classes she's got!"[16]. On the one hand, the answers illustrate the reality of the neoliberal society. When societal hardship strikes, those who need the most support are left to fend for themselves without the support of the state. On the other hand, the answers highlight a readiness to answer the question about circumstances by showing themselves to be needing the help, and somehow deserving the help given for this campaign.

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[13] Interview Aileen, 23rd March 2021

[14] Fieldnotes, Participant Observation Notes, 25th March 2021

I felt the contrast when asking the same question to the parents who came to the new location. The area was known to be a difficult one; when many volunteers spoke about it, they often added an "Aye, it's rough up there.", to what they were saying with a grimace. The difficulty that the neighbourhood was facing was one of the reasons that the food bank managers spoke of its necessity to set up the space, to help the community and support them. The parents with whom I spoke to during the collections, often had surprise in their voices when they explained they did not know why they had come. Many of them did not seem to have an answer that came to mind; instead, they were less revealing about their circumstances. Their answers suggest that their lack of previous connection with the food banks shows less exposure to the food banks' portrayal of their service users. They did not feel the need to match this demographic, but instead were free to be surprised, and unsure with the question.

The contrast shows the parents at the community centre base to be aware of this image of the service user going to the food bank. When they are service users themselves, therefore, they fit themselves to meet this expectation. They understand that those who get help are 'needy' and so show themselves to be needy as well. It illustrates that they are not just passive receivers of charity, but instead aware of the interaction and expectation of the practice of going to the food bank (Banerjee et al. 2012). It shows the activeness in the service users of the food bank and how they navigate their food insecurity.

In this chapter, I have illustrated how the narrative that is perpetuated in society and by the food bank, is of a certain kind of service user who comes to the charity; one who is 'needy' and 'deserving'. Understanding this dynamic as structural violence shows how shame and stigma are prohibiting individuals from using the foodbank. The shame and stigma mean that the everyday reality of food insecurity as structural violence is forgotten and instead pushed aside. As a result, service users do not feel that they fit in with the perception of who is going to the food bank when they need help and support.

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[15] Fieldnotes, Participant Observation Notes, 25th March 2021

[16] Fieldnotes, Participant Observation Notes, 25th March 2021

Interlude

There are three volunteers I focus on in the following chapter, Cat, Mairi, and Isobel. Three women who were all born and raised in Glasgow, Scotland. There are different ways of describing them. They are all regular volunteers, all mothers, ages spanning across their thirties and forties. They have been working at the community centre and food bank for different periods. The longest-running volunteer is Cat, she is very tall and the quietest of the three. When there is a group discussion, she is the most likely to be silent and listening. She is caring and often calm during the chaos found on Wednesdays during the Food Share. It is well known, and she shared with me, that she is a very anxious person and often struggles with her anxiety. Volunteering at the community centre for over nine years has helped her a lot, allowing her to be more comfortable in new situations and challenges that arise at the foodbank as she has been working there. Mairi has the second-longest time working there of the three. She and Cat are good friends, and it is lovely to hear them talk about how they are there for each other and how their friendship supports them both. Mairi has a lot of power and energy in her. She talks a lot, and can often turn fiery and passionate in her language. It took quite a while for her to get used to me as a newcomer to the foodbank. In the beginning, she essentially walled me out and only after two or three weeks did she warm to me and ask my name. She began her time at the foodbank by coming as a service user and quickly started volunteering instead. Isobel was the newest volunteer of the three at the foodbank. She had started volunteering at the beginning of the pandemic when she was put on furlough, and wanted something to do during the week. When Isobel first came to see about volunteering, a team member had started chatting to her and given her some food right then and there. Since she had been on furlough during the entire pandemic, she had come in three days a week to help at the foodbank. She was someone who I often observed and experienced being welcoming and kind, helping the new people to get to know the ropes at the food bank, and listening and checking when service users had specific requests for certain flavours or types of food. I also experienced her as generous, going to buy milk from the shop next door often for our coffee and teas, or giving money for eggs so that a volunteer Becca could make pancakes for everyone. She is friendly and likes to chat with other volunteers about her children or the diet she was on at that moment. The three women are all single parents. Cat and Mairi both have grown-up children, as well as having one teenager each. Isobel has twins, who are preteens, and one older teenage son. Mairi is on benefits and volunteered almost full time at the foodbank, whilst Cat and Isobel have jobs that they were currently on furlough from during the pandemic.

Chapter 4

Unable to ask for help

In the last chapter, I showed how structural violence upholds food insecurity; however, only certain groups of people are seen and felt to be deserved of help, leaving others struggling but unable to break past social shame and stigma to get the help they need.

In this next chapter, I will show that neoliberal policy and the government in Scotland have influenced society and individuals, so that when volunteers at the food bank are struggling with food insecurity, they feel unable to ask for the help they need in a traditional charity context. I will then show how the volunteers at the foodbank navigated this context of food insecurity and neoliberalism, by getting help from the foodbank not as service users but as volunteers, with access to the free and cheaper food. The chapter will focus on three women who were long-term volunteers at the foodbank. They were all born and raised in Glasgow and so exposed to the push of neoliberalism beginning in the U.K. in the 1970s (Harvey 2007). I observed the three women being in the position of needing help. They were victims of the structural violence of being on low-income or state benefits in Scotland, making it a struggle to support their families. The position of these three volunteers shows the dynamic that I observed from service users and other volunteers coming to the food bank.

‘The system isn’t built for women like my mother to succeed’[17]

I will first show how the volunteers at the foodbank, Cat, Mairi and Isobel are victims of structural violence within a Scottish neoliberal context. A feature of a neoliberal state is the increase of socioeconomic inequalities (Domanski 2000; Siegelbaum 2004; Heyns 2005; Kideckel 2008). Cat, Mairi, and Isobel are emblematic of the people in Glasgow who have a lower socioeconomic status. Cat and Isobel were both working, and Mairi was on state benefits. Within the neoliberal society, their value is not as high as individuals with higher socioeconomic status, as the meritocracy implicit in neoliberalism suggests that their success is down to their work and effort. The ‘lack’ of success or economic stability, in a neoliberal context, is therefore down to their failure (Brown 2005; Foucault 2010; Harvey 2007). When the lens of structural violence is applie, it shows that the problems that Cat, Mairi, and Isobel face, with providing for themselves and their families, is not down to personal failure but down to the economic and political structuring of Scottish society which leaves them marginalised and vulnerable (Farmer 2004; Deverteuil 2015).

The statement from the footballer Marcus Rashford of how his mother was a part of a system that was against her, spoke to me of Cat, Mairi, and Isobel. The cost of living in Scotland was too high, and the money they got, either from their jobs or from the government, often left them too short and struggling to provide for their families. It is the manifestation and lived experience of the inadequate structural organisation in Scottish society, which meant they were vulnerable to harm outside their control. The conditions that they had no control over, such as wage and living costs, made their circumstances difficult.

The following is an excerpt from an interview with Isobel.

> **Steph:** *Do you feel like there are places to turn for help?*
>
> **Isobel:** *No there isn’t. There’s no[t] enough, no[t] enough places. I think we need to start opening up more places that will help people, especially with like the gas and electricity, it is rising all the time. And it’s going up again this year. And like myself, I can see like, I struggle just now to pay it. So, if it’s going up even more, how am I going to pay it?*
>
> **Steph:** *And your wages isn’t going up enough to support the rest of it going up?*
>
> **Isobel:** *Aye, they’re no[t] going up enough for everything. So yeah, like, I need to cut back on like certain things.*
>
> **Steph:** *Yeah, I really get that.*

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[17] Quote from Marcus Rashford, talking about this mother. See Bibliography for complete source.

> **Isobel:** *And sometimes you cannae [cannot] cut back on things, because like kids always need clothes.*
>
> **Steph:** *Absolutely.*
>
> **Isobel:** *They always need food.*
>
> **Steph:** *Yeah. You always need to pay your bills so that you can have heating.*
>
> **Isobel:** *Yeah, aye, so what can I cut back on? You know, there's nothing really, I can cut back on when I need it all there.*

This excerpt articulates the struggle that Isobel experienced with making her financial circumstances. There was the feeling of constantly not having enough money. It was a struggle which I understood from all three women at different points and in various ways. For Isobel, there was a feeling of being stuck and unable to manage her resources, even if she was careful. This excerpt from Isobel shows how the three women, Cat, Mairi, and Isobel, were caught and affected by the structures of Scottish society, instead of circumstances they could control and change.

The neoliberal individual

I will now highlight that neoliberalism has influenced individuals so that it is shameful and stigmatising to ask for help. The food bank users who try to avoid being seen coming for help illustrate this. Earlier, I detailed how certain groups of people were understood to 'deserve' the food bank's help, and how there were distinct groups of 'needy' service users, children, and asylum seekers. As all three women, Cat, Mairi, and Isobel, had young children, they could be a part of the scheme hosted by the food bank during the holiday, in which they received food parcels for their children. Because the grants given were explicitly for helping children, the hampers created for the 'Holiday Hunger' and the Scottish Television (STV) campaigns were for children. The parcels included cereal and snacks, children's toothbrushes and gummy sweets, and crisps and biscuits, all aimed at a child's supposed taste in food. In this case, there was no explicit thought for the parents of these children; Cat, Mairi, and Isobel. They stood outside of the category of 'needy children' and, therefore, outside of the understanding of needing support. The governments Free School Meals scheme, the Holiday Hunger and STV grants were campaigns aimed at feeding hungry children in families. What I observed as missed in this approach were the adults in the family. The intention behind the schemes was for the pressure to be lifted from the parents with meals provided for the children. Although this seemed to be the case, and during my conversations with service users on the days that we distributed these parcels to the parents of the children, I often received this feedback; the scheme itself was addressing one of the symptoms of the fundamental structural problem that these families were experiencing. Their day-to-day existence is predetermined because of the systems and structures in Scottish society. Instead of addressing this issue at its root, the state distanced itself from the problem (Larner 2000) by focusing on one of the symptoms, child food insecurity, and ignored the more significant issue that is going on. For the adults struggling in Scottish society, the issue is presented much more as the individual's responsibility (Cradock 2007), and that these individuals will be able to work themselves out of their struggle by working harder than others around them (Monbiot, 2016).

The structuring power of neoliberalism means that the entrepreneurial drive (Harvey 2005) demanded in Scottish society, requires 'individual initiative' (Doolan et al. 2019). This ideal means either navigating the resources at one's disposal, spending less on something and being more careful, or working harder and gaining access to more resources, such as working more and earning more money. Cepić (2019) details how in the turn towards neoliberalism in Croatia, the state highlighted how '[individuals] primarily rely on the results of their own labour.' (Government of the Republic of Croatia, 2006, 6). This line of thought highlights the thought that the resources that one has, are down to how hard one has worked. When Isobel, above, speaks of how her resources are not matching her family's needs, the neoliberal state understands this as Isobel not having worked hard enough, and the problem, therefore, lying at her feet. The reality of the structure of Scottish society for those on low-income or state benefits means not being able to work hard enough to manage financially. Because the system is against them; I argue that the neoliberal ideal of the self-responsible individual (Bondi 2005) is therefore flawed.

Not asking

"Who do you see coming to the food bank?" I asked many times during my different interviews. I was curious to see whom the volunteers noticed coming for help, and if they categorised the people that came to us. The answers I received from the volunteers were sometimes

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[18] Interview Isobel, 19th April 2021

specific; Cat pointed out that we had many asylum seekers coming to us, or Isobel, that we had people from different cultures coming. However, what often came was the answer that it could be anyone and everyone that would need help. The food bank as a source of help was there to be used by anyone who needed it. The spoken understanding grounding the food bank was that everyone needed help at some time in their lives and should have access to help. The food bank was set up and run day-to-day with the knowledge that many people were struggling in Glasgow, and that they wanted to be there to support those who needed it. The difficulty that I observed, was that there were people like Cat, Mairi, and Isobel, who needed support, but felt unable to ask for help when they needed it

28th April 2021

I am sat in the room at the front of the community centre with Cat. The room has always been quite bare; it has a plastic table in the middle with four chairs with blue cushioning on them around it, which is as far as permanent furniture goes. It is a room that often gets filled with things. Bin bags stuffed with donations from the broader community before they get moved on, bikes, both mine and Harry's, and now lots of small cardboard boxes filled with tiffin tins stacked up on the windowsill. We are midway through the interview we are doing together. At the beginning of the interview, I could feel the nervousness radiating off Cat. Her first answers were a bit jumbled as she tried to get her words out, and I spent a bit of time in the beginning, chatting with her to try and allow her to relax. Cat sits often for several moments with the questions I ask her; she often starts with "errm" and then looks past me up onto the wall behind me. As the interview goes on, I move the questions to a more personal nature and ask her about her own experience of needing to use the food bank. At the beginning of the interview, she told me how during the pandemic, she had been struggling to make ends meet, as she spent more money. "[My daughter is] having to do work from home, so [she is]using more electricity and feeding, so I'd say [there is] a big big difference. I struggled myself. You know you don't, you really notice. Especially the electricity, you know, because she was on zoom calls" [19]. I ask her if she feels like there is a place she can turn to and get practical help if she needs it. She pauses with a few um's and er's and then says, "So I would, obviously just come here and maybe ask." and then after a pause "Because I wouldn[t] know where else to go to, do you know what I mean?"[20]. I then asked if she thought she really would ask or if her pride or something else would get in the way. She replies "Erm, I think if I was really, really desperate, I would. Other than that, because I know there's people out there that are worse than myself. You know, so only if I was really, really desperate stages then, I would ask." [21]

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[19] Interview Cat, 28th April 2021
[20] Interview Cat, 28th April 2021

This sentiment and the words from Cat mirror what I heard in different ways from Mairi and Isobel. The feeling that their struggle was not as legitimate and as bad as others they knew coming to the food bank, and that they should not come to get help because others could need it more.

As argued earlier, those who cannot support themselves within the system, groups such as children and asylum seekers, are understood to be 'deserving' of charitable support. The neoliberal state expects grown adults within society to be capable and able to look after themselves. Treanor (2005) underlines the need for humans within the neoliberal vision to act by managing their own life, which translates to managing without the help of the state or charity. Often when this is not possible, and support is necessary, such as using a food bank, there is a feeling of failure and embarrassment. Cat feeling like she would not come and get help unless she were desperate shows the barrier for individuals like Cat to receive help when they need it. The structural origin of food insecurity means that the struggle that people like Cat, Isobel, and Mairi face, will most likely not be manageable by themselves, no matter the 'initative' (Doolan et al. 2019) and responsibility (Cradock 2007) that these women take, they are not able to fix the problem. Their struggle in their daily lives is predetermined by the structures around them, not by the effort and initiative that they put in. Therefore, the neoliberal idea of the individual, is problematised with the lens of food insecurity as structural violence.

There was a wish from the three women to avoid the embarrassment of the association with failure. Something that came up with Isobel often when we spoke about volunteering was the embarrassment that came with her work. She explained in one of the first times we spoke about how she had been nervous the first Wednesday that she had come to help in the Food Share. She was worried she would know someone, and they would make the connection that she was there for help.

During our interview, she spoke about the people coming to the Food Share trying to hide their struggle. "You know [in] showing that they're struggling because they don't want to ask for help either. You know you don't want anybody to know that you're struggling. You're trying to do it yourself."[22]. Her words spoke to describe service users coming to the food bank, but it was clear from my conversations and observations that they also applied to herself. Embarrassment came up in our interviews from all three women, embarrassment from service users coming to the food bank, and sometimes embarrassment for themselves. There was a clear desire to ensure that their community would not know and associate them with struggling and needing help. If they were known to be receiving help from the food bank, it would be a source of embarrassment. The need to distance themselves from being people who also needed help from a charity rather than just volunteering at one, was something I saw many times in my observations of them and our conversations. This failure to look after oneself that neoliberal society asks for (Treanor 2005) brings feelings of embarrassment. To avoid these emotions, Cat, Mairi, and Isobel, therefore, avoided being in the role of needing help and support; they were not service users and did not want to be mistaken as such.

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[21] Interview Cat, 28th April 2021
[22] Interview Isobel, 19th April 2021

Working in exchange for food

3rd March 2021

It is around 1 pm on a Wednesday, the usual customers for the Food Share have come and gone, and there is still quite some food on the tables. There are different juices and yoghurts, cheese, lots of meat, some ready meals, and still fruit and vegetables. There are many many tins of cans, and what looks like endless loaves of sliced bread. "Are yous [you all] getting a bag?" Gemma, Mairi's adult daughter, who is often in charge, asks around the room. She makes sure to ask everyone. "John? Are you? David, any for you this week?" I shake my head and decline when she asks me. Some say yes and put the £5 into the cash box along with their name on the list. It varies from week to week, often depending on how good the food selection is. If there are many good things left, nearly everyone will get a bag; if fewer, a few will leave it. Cat gets a bag for her family. Isobel says she will get two bags, I later find out that she will get one one week for her mum, and one week for her dad and the other is for her own family. Both her parents have cancer and are in some way physically impaired. Mairi says she will get a bag for her family, and her daughter Gemma says she will get one for her Granny and "her granny's wee [small] pals". David, a volunteer who comes only on Wednesdays, gets two bags for different families he knows who are waiting for the decision on their asylum case. Becca gets a few pieces for herself, and Alina also gets one for her and her parents. Jonathan also gets one for himself and one for his brother. Everyone goes around the tables with the reusable bags they have brought themselves, sturdier long-life bags that can be carried more comfortably, and pick up the items they want. The unspoken assumption is that when we are on this side of the door, we still create bags the same as we would for a customer coming from outside; however, I see people picking and choosing, some leaving things they are not fond of and taking extra of something else instead. I often see Mairi and Gemma creating big bags for their family, and I know that Mairi has quite a few people at home and her daughter's boyfriend, who stays and always eats a lot. After everyone has finished making their bags, Gemma checks again. "All right, is there anyone else still wanting a bag?" when no one replies in the affirmative, she follows up with, "Okay, then people take what you like. All this food has to go!"[23]. So starts the second round of taking for free. A lot of the food is perishable, and there is not the facilities or space to store the fresh food (towards the end of my time there a notice gets passed around that the canned foods should be left as they are non-perishable). After a while, there are not so many things left, still lots and lots of bread as always, and a few bits of meat, and then one-off extra things, a yoghurt or bottle of juice, an extra bag of veggies, and a few vegan meat-free pies that so far no one has touched. By the end, there is almost nothing left, bags are extra full, and the few items not taken are put in the small kitchen fridge to be distributed tomorrow in food parcels for service users. There is still much bread that we will need to double up to get rid of before its best-before date. Quickly the attitude turns to leaving, and people start to bring their bags out to the car, coming back in for multiple trips. Mairi does a hoover of the carpets whilst a few others of us wipe the tables down, fold them up and put them in the back. Most people leave by mid-afternoon with a cheery a "Bye!" and "See you next week!" [24].

The vignette above shows a typical day at the Food Share on a Wednesday. The Food Share acts to help those on low-income and those who are service users of the food bank by getting a large quantity of food for a reduced price.

As illustrated above, for the volunteers, the Food Share served as a source of cheaper and often free food for them and their expansive network, who were often on low-income and state benefits. The access was without the embarrassment of coming to the front door and being mistaken for a service user, which meant avoiding the accompanying feelings of failure. Instead, it was all behind the front door, with only other volunteers in the same position around. The access that family and friends of the volunteers had to this food through them, was substantial. Almost all of the volunteers took bags at some point or another to help someone close to them, whether this was a brother, friend, parent, or neighbour. The Food Share allowed them access to help that was not in this charity dynamic. For the volunteers at the food bank, the barrier was lower to get a bag from the Food Share, as they were not seen coming up to the door of the food bank but were instead already inside, surrounded by their friends and people in the same position as themselves. They, therefore, navigated their food insecurity, and the failure that came with it, by volunteering at the food bank and gaining access to the help in an indirect way. For their network, too, their access meant the Food Share's support without the dynamic of coming to a charity and being seen to have failed in supporting themselves that the Scottish neoliberal society demanded.

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[23] Fieldnotes, *Participant Observation, Notes 17th March 2021*

[24] Fieldnotes, *Participant Observation, Notes 17th March 2021*

In this chapter, I have shown how individuals' internalisation of the neoliberal ideal of individualism and responsibilism, prohibits them from asking for help, even when struggling with the structural violence of food insecurity. I then illustrated how the volunteers navigated this internal struggle, by using the Food Share as a way for themselves and their network to access food that did not mean entering the typical charity dynamic.

Chapter 5

A place of exchange

In the previous chapter, I showed how neoliberalism and structural violence are intertwined and imposed on the lives of the volunteers at the food bank. I showed how the volunteers navigate this dynamic by having access to food through their work as volunteers.

This chapter will show how the volunteers navigate this influence of neoliberal ideals by engaging in their work at the community centre as a gift exchange. The volunteers who are victims of structural violence can navigate the neoliberal dynamic present in the charity by receiving food in a system of gift exchange with their work. I will first show how charities have taken up the state's role in a neoliberal society and will then go on to show how the volunteers, who are often marginalised members of society can get the help they need by using the food bank as a place of gift exchange.

Charities within neoliberalism

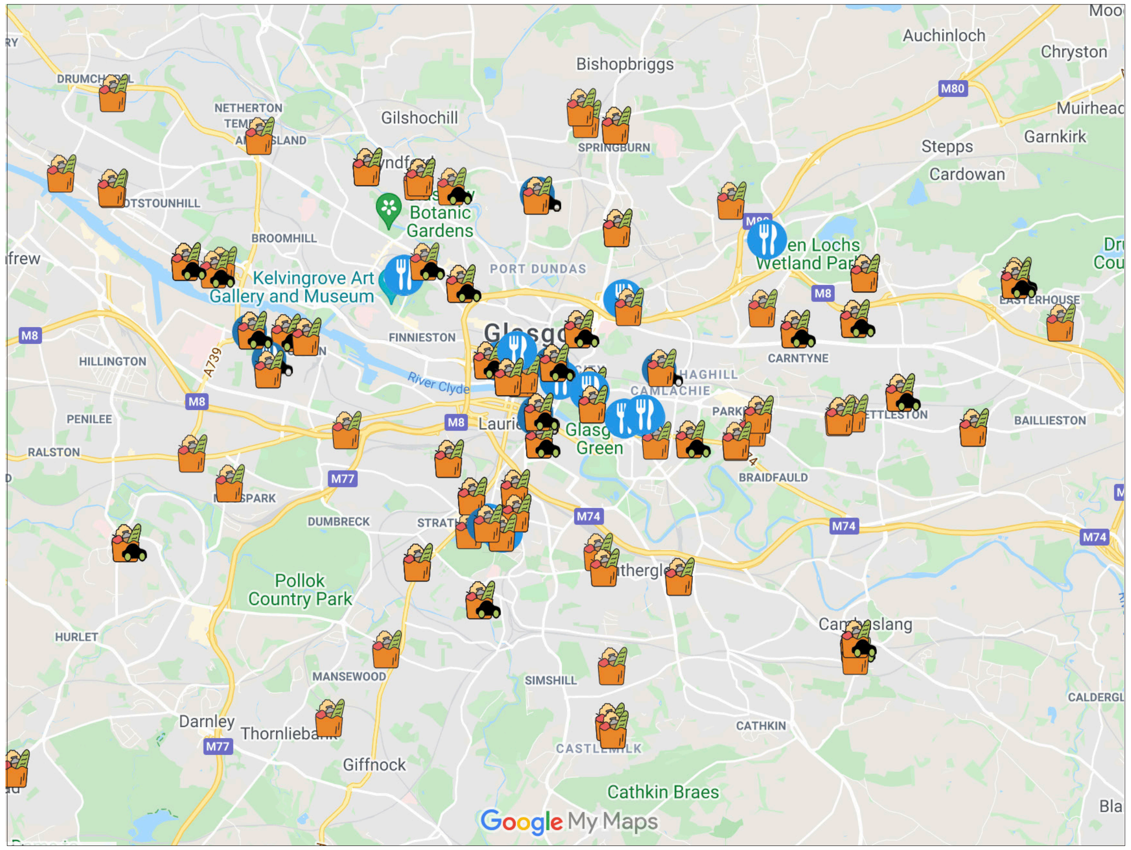
Bishopbriggs
Auchinloch
Chryston
Gilshochill
Stepps
Cardowan
Garnkirk
Botanic Gardens
Kelvingrove Art Gallery and Museum
PORT DUNDAS
FINNIESTON
Glasgow
Hogganfield Loch / Frankfield Loch Wetland Park
HILLINGTON
PENILEE
RALSTON
DUMBRECK
Pollok Country Park
Glasgow Green
CARNTYNE
BAILLIESTON
BRAIDFAULD
Rutherglen
Cambuslang
HURLET
MANSEWOOD
SIMSHILL
Darnley
Thornliebank
Giffnock
CATHKIN
Cathkin Braes
CASTLEMILK
Google My Maps

Figure 4: *A screenshot of an online map showing where to get free food in Glasgow* [25]

Symbol reader: Car = delivery possible, Bag = food parcel, Cutlery = meals

Before looking at the foodbank as a space where gift exchange occurs, I will first briefly outline the idea of charity and the social sector within a neoliberal society. In November 2020, when I first started looking more concretely for the possibility of doing fieldwork within the context of food insecurity in Glasgow, I began my research into what projects and initiatives were going on in the city. The results were extensive. The city boasted a wide range of resources for those struggling with supporting themselves and their families with enough food. A few handful of food banks, cafes, and restaurants gave out free meals. Some were to specific groups of vulnerable people, such as the homeless, and some were simply open if someone came to them in need. There were also stalls, weekly or bi-monthly, giving out free hot meals to everyone who came by. The map above (see Figure 1) is an online guide from the initiative Urban Roots, a 'community-led environmental charity' (n.d.) which shows the places in the city where free food is accessible and information on who can get it and how. Glasgow, as a city, is renowned for its higher-than-average poverty rates and mortality rates (Understanding Glasgow n.d.). However, what is evidenced by the map above (see Figure 1) is the community spirit and grassroots commitment that is present in the city to tackle the problems that poverty causes.

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[25] https://www.urbanroots.org.uk/freefood/

This action by local people and by charities to take up the work of the social functions of the state has been documented elsewhere in neoliberal societies (Muehlebach 2012; Doolan et al. 2019), and shows how many, like those on low-income or state benefits at the food bank, are marginalised and forgotten by the state. Those volunteers in the foodbank, the single mothers such as Cat, Isobel, and Mairi, those with disabilities like Jonathan, or those unable to find long-term work like Harry, are forgotten and left to struggle. "They [the politicians] should try surviving on what we get", Isobel says to me several times during a conversation we have one day whilst sorting food, "I bet they couldn't." [26]. The reality of neoliberal society is that a few at the top hold much of the wealth (Urciuoli 2010), with little regard for those struggling with less. In the U.K., the continued presence of the neoliberal state, has meant that the responsibility of public functions and the social side of the state have been transferred to the free market (Harvey 2005; Bourdieu 2010; Wacquant 2009), relieving the state of this work and responsibility. The systematic problem of food insecurity detailed in the previous chapters has created a need for which the community of Glasgow has stepped to meet instead of the state. These charities and initiatives meet the problem of poverty rooted in, and exacerbated by, the structure and running of Scottish society. The food bank had no continuous support from the government and was instead kept afloat by single grants and donations they applied for from the government or private donors. The work it was doing every day and throughout the year was supporting those struggling within and outside of the system, by supplying them with food and in some cases emotional support when 'the system' of state benefits or an earned wage failed. This example shows how neoliberalism upholds the structural violence that is food insecurity and poverty within Glasgow.

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[26] Fieldnotes, Participant Observation Notes, 26th February 2021

Volunteers at the heart of the food bank

I will now detail the structure of the employees and volunteers at the food bank in the community centre to illustrate the different types of people who spent time there. Volunteers primarily run the community centre. Some managerial positions are occupied by employed people, like Mehrang and Alina, and at the top, Rahmi and her husband, Hazeem. However, the day-to-day of the place is kept flowing by people coming in from the community and volunteering their time each week to keep the place going. As my fieldwork progresses, it seems that there is a core group of volunteers who have been living in the community for a long time and are all born in Scotland. Mairi, Cat, and Isobel are all women who regularly come each week and will keep coming. Alongside them, in the day to day, there is Harry, an older man also from Glasgow, who comes in in the late afternoon and evenings and oversees sorting the stock out. There are then regular Wednesday volunteers, who come just once every week. There is Gemma, Mairi's daughter, David and Jonathan, John, who volunteers on a Wednesday but comes in to chat on other days and lend his advice for problems going on. These are all volunteers who seem settled in the community and are from Glasgow initially. Most of them are also people whom I observe and hear speak about how they are struggling or in need of some support in one way or another. Many of them are in this marginalised group in neoliberal society; they are therefore expected to support themselves instead of being genuinely supported by the state (Brown 2005; Foucault 2010; Harvey 2007). This expectation is within a system that will not let them succeed (Domanski 2000; Siegelbaum 2004; Heyns 2005; Kideckel 2008).

The second group of volunteers is where I fit in, people who come for shorter periods and have an end date in sight, feeling that their time there is more temporary. Some of these volunteers were people who knew they had spare afternoons before their job started up again from furlough or wanted to get out of the house for a while and do something rewarding and valuable. They were often people who had seen the volunteering opportunity posted on the Volunteer Glasgow page, and were either born in Scotland or long-term residents of Scotland. The other kind of short-term volunteers were individuals who also were asylum seekers. The foodbank actively welcomed asylum-seekers to volunteer with them; the managers understood the mental health benefits of getting out of the house and the positive connections to the community and the city that volunteering could bring. The benefit of connection to Scottish society and being seen as 'actively engaged' rather than 'passively' waiting for their asylum case decision was also understood. Both Becca, and the woman who came to volunteer after smelling the food at the door, Ashia, were seeking asylum, and told me that they were actively suggested to volunteer by their caseworkers as they said it would help their asylum case. Mehrang also testified to this;

he received his leave to remain a few months before I arrived, but he had been volunteering at the community centre before that. In one of his case meetings, he said they asked if he was committed to Scottish society and liked that he was volunteering; they even asked if he would continue after he got his leave to remain. This requirement of asylum seekers to show how they will be positive contributors to Scottish society shows how the neoliberal idea of entrepreneurship and being able to support oneself (Brown 2005; Foucault 2010; Harvey 2007) applies already to asylum seekers, even though they do not yet have the full rights of being a Scottish citizen. The need that they fit in this ideal becomes apparent in this suggestion of volunteering.

The men who were volunteering their time working at the second premises, mostly in construction, whilst I was in Glasgow, were also there for short periods. Alongside them, there were also a few women, who were asylum seekers, volunteering, mostly doing cleaning and clothes sorting. Becca and Ashia, are the only two volunteers who were asylum seekers who worked mainly in the food bank space, and for the first half of the time that I was there, Becca was also often at the second premises or the third one where a lot of donated-clothes sorting went on. The division was sometimes very stark, the volunteers with no fundamental rights in Scotland were doing the heavy work at the second and third premises, building or cleaning, and sorting clothes donations, and the Scottish born volunteers were sorting food and making food parcels at the foodbank. Sometimes the line was less clear; towards the second half of my work there, Mairi often went to help with painting at the second premises, and sometimes others joined her. There was a general reluctance to go to the second premises, where the work would be more monotonous and physical. The hierarchy could be explained as seniority, that those who have been there for longer, work in the space where knowledge and know-how are needed; however, this did not always make sense. A few times, some new Scottish born volunteers came, and they rarely seemed to go for the more monotonous work at the second and third premises, and instead were brought in at the food bank.

This explanation illustrates that the food bank exists as a part of Scottish society and not in a vacuum. The hierarchy that existed within the charity shows the structural violence of racial inequality often found in the structure of British society (Daye 1994). This explains the divide of the volunteers and their experience. It shows how structural violence which is upheld by neoliberalism is present in the foodbank, even though as an organisation they are working to support the people within society who are victims of the broader issue.

19th February 2021

At the end of the first week of my fieldwork, I come in on Friday into the foodbank. Isobel always comes on Friday, and we spend the first while cleaning the place up a little. There is a referral printed out, so I take it up and start making it. It is for a single man, and I am still a little insecure with how much of everything to put in the parcel. I have watched different people put differing amounts of the various items in, sometimes two kinds of cereal, sometimes one, sometimes spaghetti AND short pasta. Nothing much is going on, and when Mehrang comes and ask if I can come to another premise to work today, I agree happily. Isobel says she will stay behind to look after things here. Just as we leave Becca arrives, and Mehrang asks her to come along as well. When we arrive at the second premises, it is clear it is still very much in its building site phase.

There are two men out at the front moving some wood beams around, and an open door that leads to a long conservatory inside, shows there are many more men in various actions of construction inside. There are two middle-aged white men there, one of whom seems to be in charge, and I later find out he is the only person out of all the men being paid. Becca and I get to work and set about around the back, clearing out the yard by sweeping leaves slowly decomposing into heaps; another volunteer Tenneh arrives a bit late and joins in. After a while, we go inside and start trying to clean chair covers; the process is hard work and not very fruitful. After much scrubbing on the covers, they still seem pretty discoloured. As we work inside, I have the chance to see the volunteers, all of whom seem to be men of colour and black men, moving about their work, some inside and some out. At lunchtime, we stop, resigned to the fact that the chair covers need professional work. On our way back in the car, Mehrang talks about the male volunteers doing the construction work. He criticises that they often do not work long days; the project is taking a lot longer than they thought it would and is costing more money. He complains that they often leave after half a day of work, when they have had their lunch and often come in late in the morning. I privately wonder to myself at his expectations, they are volunteers, and their work is skilled. The commitment he expects from them seems pretty high given the circumstances. I inquire, and he says they are all men waiting on their asylum case decision.

On another day, a month or so later, I am sat in the main room of the foodbank dividing up a huge bag of rice into smaller bags. On Wednesdays, we often get bags around 50kg in from the Food Share, and later we divide them up into smaller bags for food parcels. I hear a cheery commotion at the door and peer around the door frame to see three women collecting their food parcels from Sammy, who is working at the office desk today. One of the women sniffs into the air "Hmm, it smells good!" she exclaims. Alina is in the kitchen cooking lunch, and aromatic smells are wafting through the rooms to reach the front. She smiles and smells again and then says, “If you want, I come here to cook, I am good cook”. She is smiling and exudes warmth and kindness, even with these few sentences. She looks middle-aged, somewhere in her forties and has olive skin and hair that is a light brown streaked heavily with grey. Sammy gladly agrees and tells her that she can come by tomorrow and start if she wants to. The intake of volunteers in this way is very common for the community centre, Isobel described a similar experience, and I see others throughout my time there coming by as service users and progressing to volunteers as the time goes on.

Both vignettes illustrate that the people who are volunteers at the food bank are often vulnerable and marginalised within society. When the volunteers are asylum seekers, they are in the vulnerable position of waiting on their case to be decided, with the threat of being sent back to their home country. They mostly have little money, have no right to work, and live in undesirable places that were often initially challenging to rent (UNHCR 2021). This combination of being unable to work, but needing to support themselves somehow because the state money they receive is too little, often means that asylum seekers end up doing precarious work (Waite et al. 2015). The work asylum seekers are doing at the food bank shows this. They were less likely to be doing steady work and instead were doing shorter-term work, such as clothes sorting and construction, that would end. Some asylum seekers stayed for longer at the food bank; Mehrang, the manager, had come to the U.K. seeking asylum and had begun his work at the food bank as a volunteer before becoming employed by the charity. However, most of the asylum seekers seemed to fit into this short-term volunteer mould.

The volunteers who initially come to the foodbank as service users are in vulnerable positions, because they struggle to meet their basic needs when they come to the food bank for help. They are struggling to support themselves and their families, and are therefore experiencing the shame of having failed to look after themselves discussed in the first chapter and the stigma of going to a food bank.

The vignettes show how the volunteers at the foodbank are often victims of the structural violence of food insecurity and victims of structural violence as asylum seekers. Both forms limit their full potential for life (Galtung 1996), by creating conditions and limits on their live’s that make it difficult to live. The asylum seekers are stuck in limiting conditions, where they cannot adequately feed and clothe themselves with what is necessary. The volunteers come as service users who are navigating their lives with financial pressure and the emotional pressure that comes with this. They are victims of structures that are in place in Scottish society. These vignettes show that as the volunteers need support and help in their lives, they are not so separate from the service users who come to the outside of the foodbank, but are instead both service user and volunteer.

The gifts of volunteering

The heavy volunteer workforce is not new in the charity sector, and many Scottish charities and initiatives run on a volunteer basis (Scottish Government n.d.). Volunteerism is defined as choosing willingly to do unpaid work, with no obligation, to benefit the greater society, organisations, and individuals (Shure 1991, Cnaan et al. 1996, Komter 2005). This understanding means that often, as was the case in the food bank, a part of what volunteers receive in return for their work is the knowledge and feeling that they have done something good for someone else. “You go home feeling better about yourself. You were able to help somebody. You know what I mean?” [27]. Cat says in one of our conversations, and this feeling echoes almost all the volunteers with whom I work. The act of volunteering is often understood to be synonymous with being a good citizen (Miles 2006; Yap et al. 2010; Doolan et al. 2019), and also gives the intangible gift of a boost towards self-worth. The dynamic of volunteering, giving one’s time and energy for no monetary exchange, is most often understood as a gift exchange, whereby time, energy, and skills are gifted, and something immaterial is received (Mauss 1996). These immaterial gifts are things like social capital, community, and civic society (Hayamaka 2008, Volunteer Scotland n.d.). All my twelve interviewees who worked at the foodbank spoke of these intangible gifts they received whilst volunteering at the foodbank. “[It] is like family here” [28]. Ashia says to me unexpectedly as she exits the kitchen after having cooked and cleaned one day. It is a feeling which is present often, with the familiarity between the different volunteers and the friendly interactions with the different people.

The running of the foodbank is unique. Whilst in many other food banks there is a more direct line between service user and volunteer, here the benefit that comes from volunteering is not only the immaterial gifts, but also a very material one, food. What I came to understand during my fieldwork was that the draw to volunteer was not solely the promise of immaterial social capital and community that would come for the individuals, but instead was another kind of capital; volunteering and working in the food bank was in exchange for access to cheaper and free food, as well as other benefits.

There were various benefits to volunteering. On my second day, Mehrang asked if I needed a bus pass. He said that all volunteers were entitled to one for travel to their shifts. As most people came at least two times a week, they received a monthly pass. I declined as I had brought my bike with me; however, I heard and saw from Becca and Ashia, both asylum seekers with limited state support, of the benefit the free travel brought. Having travel already paid for the entire month and not having to worry about it anymore was significant support for them both. In the beginning, Alina cooked; however, as she took on different responsibilities as the Easter holidays came along and the children's hamper project demanded attention, various other volunteers took up cooking. Each day when I moved around the space during the morning making food parcels, cleaning up or working on the computer, I experienced the aromatic smell of different herbs and spices used with dishes from Afghanistan, Iraq, and occasionally Scotland. The Scottish born volunteers often commented they were getting a 'fakeaway' (a fake takeaway) when they had lunch at the foodbank. If there were leftovers once the volunteers had eaten, takeaway tubs filled with food were either taken by the volunteers or put into food parcels for the day.

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[27] Interview, Cat, 28th July 2021

[28] Fieldnotes, Participant Observation Notes, 8th April 2021

Lastly, there was the benefit of working in a place dealing with distributing food to those in need. I heard both Mehrang, and Rahmi, say multiple times to new volunteers that if they needed food, they could always ask and take what they needed from the stockroom. The Food Share as well provided much-needed support for many of the volunteers. The Glasgow born volunteers often paid for bags of the discounted food and then, when it was declared to be free at the end, took whatever extra they wished for as well. For the volunteers who were asylum seekers, like Becca and Ashia, and the others who worked at the second premises, the deal was that they got their bags for free. Becca and Ashia could go around and make their bags, and each week we put aside food for however many people there were at the second premises, and drove it over for them to divide amongst themselves.

The benefit of volunteering at the food bank for Becca and Ashia was very great. Before she started, Ashia was a service user of the foodbank. She came to a food bank after pleading with her social worker for help when struggling to support herself and two children on the money given to them by the state. Working at the foodbank allowed them both access to food, and access to the hot meals every day; Ashia always brought food home for her children and any donated clothes or household items that they would need. For the volunteers who were asylum seekers, the immaterial benefits were great; it allowed them out of the house during a nationwide lockdown, it gave a space to socialise, it gave connection to the country they were staying in and gave them a purpose. The material exchange that they received, that of food, travel and clothes was perhaps even greater. It gave them much-needed support that their situation otherwise did not allow. The British asylum system meant that their basic needs were not met, with the realities of what it cost to live in Glasgow and the U.K.. Therefore, this space in which gift exchange was possible, the exchange of voluntary work, for the material and immaterial capital, became an essential lifeline for the volunteers who were asylum seekers.

The definition of volunteerism given at the beginning of this section, which focuses primarily on the intangible gifts given in volunteering, does not fit with the volunteers' experience who were also asylum seekers at this food bank. Their work was not solely exchanged for immaterial gifts, but instead for material necessities that navigating the structural violence of being an asylum seeker in the U.K. required.

This chapter has illustrated how volunteers at the food bank engage in a gift exchange that involves receiving food in exchange for their work; this builds on the understanding of what is received when one volunteers, which traditionally is understood as psychic benefits.

Chapter 6

A conclusion

This thesis has explored how users of a food bank in Glasgow, Scotland, navigate their food insecurity within a context of structural violence and neoliberalism. The anthropological lens has applied a human level of storytelling and understanding to the structural problem of food insecurity. The use of ethnographic methods, such as participant observation, informal conversations, and semi-structured interviews (Dewalt and Dewalt 2011; O'Reilly 2012), has allowed for a richer understanding of how the volunteers and people who frequent the food bank navigate the issue of food insecurity. In addition, the methods have allowed triangulation of data which has meant a more nuanced conclusion than would have been reached by one of the methods alone.

The prevalent issue of food insecurity has come to the foreground in the U.K. during the covid-19 pandemic. Due to campaigns brought by celebrities, the issue has been highlighted for the nation to see. The stresses put on everyone in society have been felt, especially by those already navigating poverty. Therefore, those already dealing with food insecurity are in pressured circumstances. This thesis coincides with a time when the focus on food insecurity is current, and with this work, I wish to add to the understanding of the problem.

This thesis contests the narrative that food insecurity is a problem for which individuals are responsible. It instead theorises the problem as structural violence, a broader problem that requires a wider level of response. It theorises the problem to be rooted in Scottish society's structures and social practices (Farmer 2004; DeVerteuil 2015; Banerjee et al. 2012), which affect those living in Scotland rather than being at the feet of the individual who is struggling.

The previous chapters have widened the common understanding of how food banks operate and whom they support. I showed how the support for food insecurity at the food bank explicitly targets 'needy' groups of people, such as children and asylum seekers, and how the narrative of some 'deserving' food is structural violence, as it influences the social practice of who feels they can get support at the food bank. Therefore, it disregards others in society who need help due to the structural nature of food insecurity. Furthermore, this narrative creates shame and stigma surrounding the act of going to a food bank and needing support.

The idea which is perpetuated, of some deserving help, is structural violence which intertwines with the neoliberal ideal of the individual (Harvey 2007; Bondi 2005; Brown 2005). This dynamic prohibits volunteers and people who need support from asking for help. However, within this nuanced issue, individuals have agency to either fit themselves to the idea of a person needing help within the dynamic of charity, as shown by the parents coming for the children's hampers. Alternatively, individuals find a different way to access the help, as the volunteers do by using the Food Share. This understanding shows the agency that individuals have in the face of food insecurity and neoliberal ideals.

Finally, I showed how the food bank works as a place of gift exchange for its volunteers within this context of neoliberalism and structural violence. Volunteers who are asylum seekers are victims of the structural violence of the asylum system in the U.K.. However, asylum seekers in this precarious situation, can navigate their circumstances at the food bank by engaging in a gift exchange. They volunteer at the food bank, and in exchange, they receive food and other necessities.

In conclusion, reflecting on the research question, I argue that volunteers of the food bank navigate food insecurity through agency and the concept of gift exchange, and in doing so, navigate the ideals of individualism present in a neoliberal society.

Concluding note on the possibility of further research

In Glasgow, many initiatives and projects are tackling the issue of food insecurity within poverty. Many of these places are food banks that work with the principle of creating bags of food for those referred to them or who refer themselves. For further research and studies, I would like to suggest the possibility of looking at those initiatives that step outside the dynamic of charity, which involves the premise of giving to 'the needy'. Instead, these initiatives work on the concept of community and community support. I want to suggest research on how the dynamic of neoliberal 'responsibilism' plays into this different form of support for those who are dealing with poverty when the idea of one-directional support is not there.

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