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Let's Not Eat Alone: A Search for Food Security Justice

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Let's Not Eat Alone
A Search for Food Security Justice

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*Submitted to Pitzer College in partial fulfillment of a Bachelor of Arts Degree in Global
Food Studies*

PITZER COLLEGE
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Readers: Dr. Melinda Herrold-Menzies and Dr. Nancy Neiman Auerbach

“We do not invite each other simply to eat and drink, but to eat and drink together”

Debates Among Guests (Plutarch)

Abstract

The food justice movement has taken off in recent years. Despite its call for justice in the food system, it has been critiqued as being inaccessible to people who need food the most. The food system marginalizes women, minorities, and low-income people, making these groups the most at risk for food insecurity. Solutions to food insecurity come from both government and non-governmental avenues. This thesis calls for a merger of solutions to food insecurity and food justice in food security justice, and assesses the ability of solutions to food insecurity to confront issues of injustice. Community-based solutions currently have the potential to address issues of justice, as well as providing added benefits of promoting community cohesion and creating new economic spaces. Through a simulation of the SNAP budget and an exploration of the narrative between gang violence and food insecurity in Los Angeles, the necessity for solutions to food insecurity to address justice is established.

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This is for all the people working to make the right to food a reality, who are using the power of food for justice, and for the people who are fighting for food security every day.

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Preface: Intention and Healing

Food justice and food security activism are movements I am committed to and actively involved in. As an activist and academic it has become extremely important to me to bridge the gap between academia and activism, as well as between personal healing and community healing. It is dangerous to engage in a community as an activist without recognizing our own histories and how they influence our work outside of ourselves. This is in part why I chose to live on the SNAP budget: how can I write about food insecurity and the food safety net without knowing what those experiences are like? I by no means intend to say that my choosing to live on four dollars a day gives me knowledge or expertise on what receiving food stamps feels like or what it means to be food insecure. It does, however, help me to recognize my positionality, help to place the lived experience into an academic critique, and give me a better idea of the policy systems that I am discussing.

It is also important for my reader to know the source of my passion for this topic. When I say source I do not just mean my commitment to better health, my love of food, and my eagerness to work to change the injustices of the food system. I mean the source in my self, in my histories. Hala Khouri, a guest lecturer for the Institute of Global Local Action Study at Pitzer, argued that the first step to getting rid of an “us” and “them” divide in activism and community work is get rid of that divide within ourselves. With this in mind, I began to search within myself for formative life experiences that ignited this passion in me about food. Through this self-reflective journey, that is not yet over, I discovered that my passion for food came out of three important parts of my life: my

family's discourse around food, my dad's and brother's illnesses, and my exposure to hunger in a trip to visit my great aunt in Zimbabwe.

I was brought up in a food and health conscious home. I will be forever grateful for that privilege. From a young age, I was told that if I ate too much I would get fat: if not now, then in the future. As I got older, my mum and I would be given physically smaller plates at the dinner than my dad and brother. In no way do I blame this on my parents, but on the system that oppresses women through controlling their bodies. Nonetheless, I tried to assert my control in this system when I was just 10 by becoming a vegetarian. At the time I had no idea this was what I was doing. Upon reflection, it makes sense that I have now translated my own experience of the oppression of women in the food system into action towards changing the food system. Additionally, both my brother and dad have food related illnesses. My dad dealt with Crohn's disease my entire life, and spent two weeks in a hospital eating bland plates of boxed mashed potatoes and jell-o as he recovered from colon cancer surgery when I was in middle school. My brother was just recently diagnosed with Celiac disease, an allergy to gluten. While Celiac and Crohn's are not caused by diet, they forever affect what you eat, and changing your diet can dramatically improve your health. My personal experience with food related diseases led me to believe that food should be the basis of our public health system. Finally, I was exposed to the injustices of the global food system at a young age when I visited my great aunt, who was working in Zimbabwe, in 2004. At that time, food was in short supply in the country, and people would wait for hours, in lines that wound around the block, just for a loaf of bread. I was staying with a white nun and had no problems getting food, a reality that exposed the unjust distribution of food not only in Zimbabwe, but also around

the world. These personal histories have informed my desire to change the food system that produced the circumstances of injustice.

This thesis combines histories of food and health, food and justice, and food and culture in an exploration of food security in the United States and the ways in which solutions to food insecurity affect health and community.

Introduction

Everybody eats, but food, something that all people need and many enjoy, is anything but simple. It would seem counterintuitive, that something so basic is so complicated, and that something so necessary is far from easily available. Because food is vital, it touches every part of our lives. From the earth, to the home, to the country, food is a political, economic, environmental, social, and cultural entity that can bring power, pleasure, and pain. As Carole Counihan and Penny Van Esterik (2013) write, “Food touches everything and is the foundation of every economy, marking social difference, boundaries, bonds, and contradictions—an endlessly evolving enactment of gender, family, and community relationships” (p. 3). Herein is the beauty and power of food to touch all aspects of life: the beauty to sustain life, the to power to create or destroy.

As a basic human need, food is something people will constantly be working to get. The sustained ability to have access to food results in food security. The connection between food security, health, and community is my primary interest and focus. The United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), the international authority for coordinating policies on global food systems, defines food security as when all people at all times have access to safe, nutritious, and culturally appropriate food to support a healthy and active life (“Rome Declaration and Plan of Action,” 1996). Almost 15 percent of households in the United States are food insecure (Coleman-Jesnon, Nord, Andrews, & Carlson, 2011). This is an unacceptable reality for communities in the United States today, a reality that needs to be changed. While I recognize there are numerous controversies around the use and definition of community, for the purposes of

this thesis I use it to mean a group of people living in the same geographical space who may be linked by social ties, common perspectives, actions, or goals (MacQueen et al., 2001). As I began to explore the issue of food insecurity in the United States in terms of solutions through policy and non-policy avenues and how they affect individual health, it became clear to me that these solutions could not be disconnected from the communities in which they are implemented. Many community food projects that can be solutions to food insecurity also exist in food secure areas. Consequently introducing the question: are there benefits to these solutions beyond promoting food security and health? It also became abundantly clear that solutions could not be disconnected from the issue of injustice in the food system, injustice of who is affected by food insecurity. This raises another question: how well do solutions to food insecurity address injustices that determine food security? In this thesis I argue that solutions to food insecurity need to address the injustices that often lead to food security, and that community-based solutions to food insecurity have benefits beyond the promotion of food security and health through their ability to confront injustice, promote community cohesion, and create new economic spaces. As such, they can be a location to begin making broader social and structural change.

Defining the Terms

In order to follow this argument, an understanding of several broad concepts is necessary. Before I continue, I will clarify how I define the terms community cohesion, social capital as an indicator of community cohesion, economic space, food systems, and policy and non-policy solutions to food insecurity.

Community cohesion is often conflated with social cohesion. There is extensive literature and debate defining and critiquing both terms, but for the purposes of my thesis I will define community cohesion in the context in which I apply it. Social cohesion is founded in sociological concepts and is a product of solidarity between societies, rather than individuals. Community cohesion is based on individuals and notions of individual social capital (Arthur and Davies, 2010). Social capital is defined as individual connection to social networks and the trust and reciprocity that arise in those networks (Putnam, 2000). In Bowling Alone, the premier book on social capital in the United States, author Robert Putnam (2000) describes the importance of bridging social capital over bonding social capital. In bridging social capital, connections are made between people of different groups, rather than within the same group, which is the way bonding social capital functions. Bridging is inclusive and bonding is exclusive (Putnam, 2000, p. 27). Therefore, I use social capital in the sense of bridging social capital as an indicator of community cohesion. Community cohesion is defined as when “there is a common vision and a sense of belonging for all communities; the diversity of people’s different backgrounds and circumstances are appreciated and positively valued; those from different backgrounds have similar life opportunities; and strong and positive relationships are being developed between people from different backgrounds in the workplace, in schools and within neighbourhoods” (Local Government Association (England and Wales), 2002). In community cohesion, the discourses of “difference” and “other” are important ideological frameworks because community cohesion only occurs when these groups become a part the larger community (Arthur and Davies, 2010). This is done through the creation of bridging social capital, which Putnam (2000) argues is

related to safer neighborhoods, better health, happiness, and higher tolerance. In opposition, decline in social capital can lead to unsafe neighborhoods, reduced economic prosperity, poorer health, and less personal happiness (Putnam, 2000). Putnam (2000) finds that states with higher levels of social capital have proportionately lower homicide rates (p. 308). Consequently, achieving community cohesion through increasing social capital means improving community safety and decreasing levels of crime.

Another key term in this thesis is “economic space.” The most useful way to understand economic space is in comparative terms. Economic space was first defined by François Perroux (1950) as “the economic relations which exist between economic elements” (p. 94). In the food movement literature the term “new economic space” has come to mean an alternative to the “dominant economic space.” In the United States the dominant economic space is that of capitalism; the corporate, industrial economy. The industrial food system is a critical part of the capitalist economy in United States.¹ New economic spaces in food systems are created by food systems outside of the industrial food system, but not necessarily in opposition to capitalism (Dixon, 2012). In either case, I will show how new economic spaces formed out of food projects are a radical form of self-reliance departing from the industrial system.

Food systems encompass all of the networks and pathways that surround providing food to the consumer. The industrial food system has consolidated the entire food chain through multinational corporations. The consolidation and concentrated ownership of the food system, from seed to disposal, has allowed to food system to

¹ The industrial food system has been successful in non-capitalist economies outside of the US, but it is important to recognize it as a part of the capitalist economic space for the purposes of understanding alternative economic spaces outside of the industrial food system in the US specifically.

become mechanized, controlled, and financialized (Hauter, 2012). Viewing food only as profit has created a system in which the most easily accessible and cheapest foods are designed to make people want more (Hauter, 2012). The human body craves energy-dense foods, those that are high in calories, fats, sugars, and salts; a fact that agribusiness uses to its advantage in creating demand for foods (Nestle, 2007, p. 17). The industrial food system is very good at what it does. It makes food fast, cheap, and it fulfills our evolved cravings. It keeps the consumer coming back for more of the foods that are destroying the health of the nation (“The Inextricable Connection between Food Insecurity and Diabetes,” 2010; Pokress, 2010; Weaver et al., 2014). As an economic space, the industrial food system is part of a corporate, international, profit driven economy (Hauter, 2012; Nestle, 2007; Gottlieb, 2010)

For my purposes policy solutions refer to governmental policies that address food insecurity. Policy is used in the food security literature in this same way. For example, Alkon and Norgard (2009), Besharov and Germanis (2000), Ellis and Sumberg (1998), and Poppendeick (1997), all use policy to mean governmental policies. To my knowledge, there is no food security literature that uses policy to mean anything other than governmental policy. On the national level, policy solutions take the form of the food safety net. Non-policy solutions are solutions to food insecurity through non-governmental avenues. I do not include charities that provide emergency food such as food banks and soup kitchens in my definition of non-policy solutions to food insecurity because being food secure implies the ability to get food from food systems that are not stigmatized and are culturally appropriate. Charitable food systems are a solution to hunger but not food insecurity (Winne, 2009). I also choose to use the term non-policy

solutions instead of alternative solutions because the alternative food movement is often limited in its ability to provide food security to those who need it. It is not accessible to the marginalized populations affected by food insecurity, as I will explain in my review of food justice literature. Instead, non-policy solutions to food insecurity refer to community-based food security projects. It is important to differentiate between community-based solutions to food insecurity and community-based food projects. While community-based solutions take the form of community-based food projects, solutions are situated in concepts of food justice, and specifically address food insecurity rather than just provide an alternative to the industrial food system. Community-based food projects are found in both food secure and food insecure areas, but only act as solutions to food insecurity when they target food insecure households.

Process and Methodology

In order to support my thesis that solutions to food insecurity need to address the injustices that often lead to food insecurity and that community-based solutions have benefits beyond the promotion of food security and health, I undertook the research as described in the following section. As with most research, this project was transformed and reimaged over and over. I drew together literature on the determinants of food security and food justice to make the claim that solutions to food insecurity need to address justice. I again used literature and the goals of different solutions to assess the ability of policy and non-policy avenues to address issues of justice. The framework of justice in the assessment of food security solutions was in large part a result of my participatory research simulating the food stamp budget. I lived on an average of four dollars a day for one month, and spent many hours in different grocery stores searching

for cheap healthy foods. I spent one day at the Altadena farmers' market, one day at the Atwater Village farmers' market, and visited the Pomona farmers' market multiple times. Through observation of, and participation in, these markets I was able to get a better sense of the use of federal nutrition assistance programs in farmers' markets. I became acutely aware of signs on storefronts or at farmers' markets advertising "we accept EBT." I decided to conduct this participatory research, because to my knowledge nobody has ever done so in an academic setting before, and also because I felt I needed to have a better sense of the lived experience of national policy in order to adequately critique it. Finally, I used Los Angeles as a case study to better understand the way solutions are working in food insecure areas. I interviewed five community organizers and policy advocates working in the city to gain insight into the challenges, successes, and narratives around promoting food security. These interviews were conducted over the phone for one hour. A lecture by former Los Angeles gang member and peace advocate Aqeela Sherrills helped to inform my understanding of gangs in South Central LA. Conversations with Dr. Susan Phillips, a scholar of gangs in Los Angeles, also helped me to solidify my understanding of the narrative surrounding food insecurity and gang violence.

My research was also informed by my internship at Crossroads, a halfway house for formerly incarcerated women. For the past three years, I have spent five hours at Crossroads every Monday night cooking vegetarian meals and conducting workshops as part of a food justice program. It was through this internship that my interest in food justice was first sparked, and through many conversations with the women at Crossroads that I began to explore the connection between food security, justice, and community. While I did not specifically research Crossroads, the way the organization uses food

justice initiatives as part of a larger rehabilitation program for parolees inspired my research of the narrative in Los Angeles connecting solutions to food security to reduced crime and gang violence that I explore in chapter five.

Through my research, I found that scholars have not sufficiently addressed the linkage between food security and justice. As I will explain in the literature review, the food justice movement is mainly a critique of the alternative food movement for being unjust but not specifically a critique of the determinants of food security as unjust. My paper is an attempt to begin the discussion about the connection between food security and the injustices that determine food security status. Although I do not have a definitive explanation for these linkages, or for the linkages between food insecurity and violence, these are topics that I intend to explore further as a scholar, activist, and practitioner. I hope that beginning this exploration here can help to focus solutions to food security on justice. I coin the term “food security justice” to solidify the need for justice in solutions to food insecurity. By arguing that national government policies are limited in their ability to address injustices that are associated with food insecurity and that community-based solutions have the potential to confront these injustices, I will demonstrate the need for both government solutions and community-based solutions to address injustice. Finally, the case study of Los Angeles provides evidence for the importance of cooperation between government policy and community-based solutions in order to adequately confront the injustices that are connected to food insecurity.

Chapter one situates food security in the context of justice, demonstrating the need for justice in the food system based on literature on the determinants of food security, food security and health, and food justice. Chapter two demonstrates that

national government programs can work and are necessary but they are contingent upon many factors and fail to address the injustices that cause food insecurity. In chapter three my own participatory research simulating living on the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) provides evidence that policies can work but are dependent upon access, time, and education, thus reinforcing the limits of government programs in addressing issues of justice. Chapter four asserts that community-based solutions have the capacity to address the limits of national policy solutions by confronting the injustices in the food system and promoting community cohesion and creating new economic spaces, benefits beyond food security and health. Finally, chapter five is a case study of Los Angeles examining how well policy and non-policy solutions are working through the narrative connecting food insecurity with gang violence, as well as demonstrating the need for cooperation between policy and community-based solutions to effectively find food security.

Chapter One—Literature Review: Determinants of Food Security contextualized in Justice

The United Nations has declared the right to food as a basic human right (“The Universal Declaration of Human Rights,” 2014). The combination of the recognition of food as a basic human right, the increasing problem of hunger throughout the world, and ultimate goal to end hunger established at the 1996 World Food Summit gave rise to the international definition of food security. Food security on an international level is defined as existing “when all people, at all times, have physical and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food to meet their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life” (“Rome Declaration and Plan of Action,” 1996). This definition was established at the World Food Summit of 1996, a summit convened by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations. At the time of the summit 800 million people in the world did not have enough food to meet basic nutritional needs (“Rome Declaration and Plan of Action,” 1996). Food security is defined in three main aspects: availability, access, and use. Food availability means that there are sufficient quantities of food consistently available. Food access is having sufficient resources to maintain a nutritious diet on consistent basis. Food use is the ability to appropriately prepare food with the knowledge of basic nutrition and proper sanitation (“WHO | Food Security,” 2014). The World Food Summit focused on the need to solve food insecurity in developing nations, in places where food insecurity and hunger manifests itself visibly through lack of food, and health outcomes of starvation, famine, and malnutrition. When applied to industrialized nations, such as the United States, the health outcomes associated with food insecurity are chronic diseases such as obesity, overweight, diabetes,

and heart disease. The contrast in health outcomes stemming from the same issue is a result of the way in which the industrial food system disseminates itself through the global capitalist system. Because of the different ways in which food insecurity manifests itself and the many aspects of life that it touches, literature on food security is extensive around the globe.

For the purposes of framing solutions to food insecurity in the context of justice, I look at the determinants of food security as they have been established in the industrialized world, explore the health outcomes that result from food security in the United States, and then place food security in the context of the food justice movement in order to understand the social implications of the structure of the food system and its alternatives specifically in terms of food security. There is a gap in the literature connecting food security and food justice, as food security in the food justice movement is currently an offshoot of the critique of the alternative food movement. The review of the following works helps to locate the need for justice in food security.

Determinants of Food Insecurity

The diffuse nature of food places it in multiple interlocking systems and makes the causes of food insecurity complex and difficult to define for a general population. A definition and measurement of food security did not arise in the United States until the mid nineties (Olson, 1997), making the literature around it relatively new, but substantial. Research has led to the identification of four main factors causing food insecurity: race, class, gender, and education level.

Poverty has historically been pinpointed as the cause of hunger, and is positively correlated with food insecurity. It is not, however, a fixed determinant of food insecurity.

Being poor does not automatically mean that you will be food insecure, just as being above the poverty line does not automatically result in food security. Poverty only makes it more likely for food insecurity to occur (Ribar and Hamerick, 2003; Davis, 1994; Poppendiek, 1997; Sarlio-Lähteenkorva and Lahelma, 2001; Rose, 1999; and Shields, 1995). The fact that poverty does not automatically equate to food insecurity and that people who are not impoverished can be food insecure is partly due to the experience of food security as a managed process. Food security is something that individuals, families, and communities actively work towards attaining (Radimer, 1992).

Ribar and Hamerick (2003) explain that poverty and food insecurity are both indicators of economic hardship, but food insecurity depends upon more than just lack of financial capital. Their research found that incidence of food insecurity is three times higher for African Americans and Latinos in the United States than whites. Recent research conducted at the United States Department of Agriculture backs up this finding with supporting data that food insecurity rates are higher for black and Hispanic households than white households (Coleman-Jesnon et al., 2011). In his book The Color of Hunger: Race and Hunger in National and International Perspective, David Shields (1995) explains that because poverty is distributed differently between different race and ethnic groups it is almost indubitable that hunger, and food insecurity, are too. This points to interconnectedness of these issues, and the fact that the systems that create poverty and hunger are the same systems that create oppression and racism.

The gendered nature of food production, preparation, and consumption makes it almost axiomatic that gender is a determinant of food security as well. Coleman-Jenson and her colleagues (2011) found that incidences of food insecurity are higher in

households headed by single parents. Ribar and Hamerick (2003) found that female-headed households are more likely to be food insecure and less likely to become food secure. These findings indicate that the way the food system is constructed and enacted disproportionately affects women.

Lastly, education level has been directly linked to food security. Both poverty and food insecurity decline with increased levels of education, and a high school diploma decreases the rate of food insecurity (Ribar and Hamerick, 2003; Rose, 1999). The contribution of education to food security does not only have to do with education level, which directly connects to poverty and an individual's ability to get a job, but also to nutritional education and food use. Food use is one of the three main pillars that food security is built on, but preparing nutritionally dense foods can only be done with knowledge. One of the goals of federal assistance programs is to provide nutritional education (Coleman-Jesnon et al., 2011), reinforcing the relationship between food security and education.

It makes sense that poverty is a direct cause of food insecurity, but understanding that race, gender, and education are also determinants of food security nuances the way in which food insecurity can and should be addressed. It requires a knowledge of the systems that marginalize these groups of people, the food system being just one that reinforces marginalization. Scholars such as Robert Bullard, bell hooks, Stuart Hall, Vandana Shiva, and activist Cesar Chavez have explored these systems in depth. However, these systems of marginalization are beyond the scope of this thesis. Instead, I will focus on how the resulting marginalization is linked to food insecurity. However,

policy solutions focus on the established health outcomes rather than justice and systems of marginalization because food insecurity is costly for the country and individual health.

Food Security and Health

The negative health outcomes associated with food insecurity have been well researched and documented. Food insecurity in the United States is positively correlated with obesity, overweightness, diabetes, and heart disease. Diet related chronic diseases are preventable, but over 75 percent of the nation's two trillion dollar medical care costs are a result of chronic diseases (Pokress, 2010). According to the Center for Disease Control (CDC)(2012), one in three adults is obese, and one five youth between the ages of six is and nineteen is obese. Diabetes is the leading cause of kidney failure, non-trauma related amputations, and blindness among adults. The CDC (2014) also states that one in four deaths in the United States is due to heart disease, and coronary heart disease costs the US 108.9 billion dollars a year. Food insecurity is directly linked to these costly health outcomes. While food insecure populations do not account for the entirety of people with diet related chronic disease, and not all food insecure people suffer from these problems, in the rest of this chapter I will review research that has demonstrated the connection between food insecurity and diet related chronic disease.

The paradox of inadequate food supply and excess body weight creates a challenge for policy makers in proposing solutions. Townsend and her colleagues (2001) were the first to investigate this paradox on a national level. They found that there is a significant relationship between food insecurity and overweight status in women, but not men. Adams and her colleagues (2003) support this finding in research done in California, and also assert that the increased risk of obesity and overweight among the

food insecure is greatest among nonwhites. Vozoris and Tarasuk (2003) found that men in food insecure households are more likely to be underweight while women are more likely to be obese. Molly Martin and Adam Lippert (2012) argue that it is not just being a woman that makes food insecurity more likely, but being a mother. They find that food insecure mothers are more likely to be overweight and obese than food insecure non-mothers. The gendered nature of childcare provides an explanation for the distinction between overweight and obesity prevalence among men and women, and mother's and non-mothers.

From obesity and overweight come increased risks of diabetes and heart disease. The cyclical nature of food insecurity contributes to the food insecure-overweight paradox. A report by the California Pan-Ethnic Health Network (2010) states that adults facing food insecurity limit variety in their diet and focus on cheap, energy dense but nutritionally void foods, often overeating during times when they have greater access. These cyclical eating habits are detrimental to managing diabetes, a disease that is controlled by regulating blood-sugar levels. Seligman and Schillinger (2010) support these findings and expand upon the detrimental cycle of food insecurity in controlling diabetes. They state that overconsumption when food is available and subsequent fat storage “represent physiologic adaptations to food insecurity that have become maladaptive in an environment with an overabundance of available calories.” Food insecurity is also associated with increase risk of cardiovascular disease (Ford, 2013). In a review of literature linking food insecure with the development of chronic disease, Barbara Laria (2013), found that there is significant connection between food insecurity, diabetes, weight gain, and the development of chronic disease, but not direct causation.

She also suggests that during critical periods of childhood development experiencing food insecurity increases the risk of chronic disease.

Whether or not there is a direct causal link between food insecurity and chronic disease development, it is undisputed that people who are food insecure are also facing chronic diet-related disease. The intersection of race, class, and gender in determining food security with the association between food insecurity and chronic disease means that the people who are most marginalized by the food system are also the most unhealthy. It is at this nexus that the need for justice in food security is established.

Food Justice

Critiques of the industrial food system in America were incorporated into the environmental justice movement to form the concept, and activist movement, of food justice. Growing dissatisfaction with the food system in the 1970s gave rise to an alternative food movement that encourages local, organic, and sustainable food systems (Winne, 2009). Food justice has been defined as “communities exercising their right to grow, sell, and eat healthy food...[that is] fresh, nutritious, affordable, culturally-appropriate, and grown locally with care for the well-being of the land, workers, and animals” (Just Food, 2014). In addressing health, culture, and access, food justice inherently deals with food security. The food justice movement works to combat the potentially racist and classist alternative food movement as well as promote a rhetoric of health in the battle against the structures and institutions that cause diet related disease in low-income individuals.

The food justice movement has only just begun to take root. Robert Gottlieb and Andy Fisher first called for a need to explore the connections between community food

security and environmental justice in 1996 with their article “First Feed the Face.” In 2000 they emphasized this convocation in “Community Food Security and Environmental Justice: Converging Paths Towards Social Justice and Sustainable Communities.” They point out similarities between the two campaigns: the focus on place, health, systematic issues, sustainability, and empowerment. While the food justice movement has taken off since then, little scholarly work had been done until the last five years.

In Closing the Food Gap: Resetting the Table in the Land of Plenty, Mark Winne (2009) traces the parallel growth of food insecurity and obesity with the alternative food movement. He points out the inequalities of both the industrial food system and the alternative food movement by outlining the widening gap in the food system as seen through the dichotomies of local and sustainable food with fast and industrial food, health with obesity and diabetes. Winne critiques the food movement that touts local, organic, and sustainable as the only ways to combat industrial food by asking about the people who cannot afford those labels. He calls for a need to shift towards a community food security framework and commitment to a food system that is not only local, healthy, and sustainable for the privileged few but for the entire population. He also emphasizes the need for diversification in the food movement and necessitates that for real change to come it has to come from the people who it is most affecting—minorities, low-income people, and women. Ultimately, he appeals for a dedication to justice in the food movement, without specifically utilizing the term “food justice.”

Gottlieb defines the food justice movement in his book Food Justice, co-authored with Anupama Joshi (2010). In it they explain several pathways in which a

transformation towards justice can occur: producing food, local food, environment, economics, health, food preparation, hunger, and race, class, and gender inequalities. They emphasize the ability of food justice to turn the right to food into a social movement. They write, “The right to food is a powerful symbol but by itself is another in the litany of arguments that underline the failure of the dominant system to meet that right. Food justice can help illuminate the way to turn symbol into action” (p. 230). Food justice exposes the way in which the dominant systems produce injustice and fail to address the unequal distribution of hunger and food insecurity.

This exposition is further explored as Alison Alkon and Julian Agyeman (2011) attempt to fill in the literature on food justice and unite the community food movement and environmental justice movement in the way that Gottlieb and Fisher (1996) recommended. In their book Cultivating Food Justice: Race, Class, and Sustainability, Alkon and Agyeman (2011) put together a scholarly body of work to define the food justice movement. The works they draw together locate food justice in political, economic, and cultural systems that produce inequality. It is an activist and scholarly movement to bridge the gap between food insecurity, environmental justice, and sustainable agriculture. They also explore the ways in which communities of color resist the exclusionary and oppressive systems through food production and consumption in the act of food justice. They write that through food justice “the racialized political economy of food production and distribution meets the cultural politics of food consumption” (p. 13). This nexus is particularly important in situating solutions to food insecurity in culturally- and community-based context.

Attempting to change the injustices of the globalized industrial system does not occur without critique. Julie Guthman, a professor at UC Santa Cruz, problematizes the food justice movement in her book Weighing In: Obesity Food Justice, and the Limits of Capitalism (2011). While she does not disagree with critiques of the industrial food system and the food movement's advocacy for local, organic, and sustainable foods, she does not see this as movement towards justice. She argues that the definition and assessment of obesity revolves around assumptions that are limiting, that the alternative food movement is limited, and that capitalism is limited in solving the problems of the industrial food system. She argues that the food justice movement attempts to take on obesity as a problem in a way that isolates the individuals that it affects and attributes obesity to personal choice. At the same time, she claims that the food justice movement advocates and supports people who support alternative food systems while ignoring the income barrier that restricts access into these food systems. Guthman's critique is important for applying concepts of justice to food insecurity. Solutions to food insecurity inherently need to address issues of access, race, class, gender, and education if they are going to confront the justice issues that determine food security.

While the food justice movement has taken off as a critique of alternative food systems, it began from concepts of community food security. At its inception, the food justice movement takes on the intersections of race, class, and gender in food security not as fixed determinants but as results of an industrial food system that can be changed. It recognizes the limits of policy as part of the industrial system to fully address food insecurity. By championing community-based food projects, food justice seeks solutions to food insecurity through the alternative food movement that invoke a greater social,

societal, and structural change. Alkon and Norgaard (2009) write, “food justice links food insecurity to institutional racism and racialized geography” as well as “power and political efficacy.” However, Guthman’s critique of the movement helps to frame a gap between food insecurity and food justice, in part because the goal of food security is an offshoot of critiques of the alternative food movement. The fact that minorities, low-income people, women, and people with lower levels of education are at a greater risk of food insecurity, makes food security an issue of justice. Thus, there is a need for justice beyond the alternative food movement and specifically in solutions to food insecurity. The framework for food justice importantly places the need for food security in a broader context that highlights the interlocking systems that produce inequalities beyond food but can be effectively changed through food.

Chapter Two—The Limits of National Policy

National policies addressing food insecurity in the United States overlook the need for justice in the food system. Their size and scope make them absolutely necessary and able to target a large number of people, but they neglect to take into account issues of access and broader social implications of food insecurity. Instead, they focus on the health outcomes of food insecurity, and providing financial capital to food insecure individuals and households. The history of attempts to address food insecurity highlights the refusal of the government to fully acknowledge and take responsibility for hunger and food insecurity existing in the United States, ultimately ignoring injustices in the food system. This does not mean that policies have completely failed, but rather that they currently overlook a key point. In this chapter I explain this point of neglect through the history of food insecurity in the United States, and then in two major national supplemental nutrition programs: the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Woman, Infants, and Children (WIC), and the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP).

Overlooking Justice: The History of Solutions to Food Insecurity in the US

Facing hunger in the United States poses particular problems because of its status as a wealthy, first world, nation. It poses the question, can this hunger be classified in the same way that hunger in Sub-Saharan Africa is classified? The transition from identifying the need for food as hunger to food insecurity has helped to allow a broader understanding of the food issues across the globe. The United States uses a definition of food security as outlined by the Life Sciences Research Office (LSRO), “as access by all

people at all times to enough food for an active, healthy life and includes at a minimum: a) the ready availability of nutritionally adequate and safe foods, and b) the assured ability to acquire acceptable foods in socially acceptable ways” (Anderson, 1990, p. 1560). LSRO differentiates between food insecurity and hunger stating that hunger includes the pain as a result of lack of food and that it can be, but is not necessarily, a result of food insecurity (Anderson, 1990). This understanding embraces the need for food security in the entire community, rather than just the poor, and recognizes that hunger and malnutrition are related to food insecurity but that food insecurity can exist without those outcomes. Despite this broadened understanding, United States did not adopt the right to food as declared by the United Nations (Allen, 2007).

Until food security was defined on a policy level in the early 90s, policy and non-policy solutions existed in the United States to address hunger. In the 1930s, hunger was a paradox of need in a time of crop surpluses across the country. Policy solutions addressed the problem of hunger by distributing surplus farm products to people in need. These transfers began the national school lunch program as well as the food stamp program, but prioritized benefits to agricultural producers (“A Short History of SNAP,” 2014). By focusing on agriculture rather than on the fact that people were going hungry, the government refused to take full responsibility for the welfare of its citizens. The first Food Stamp Program lasted only between 1939 and 1943 because the unmarketable food surpluses and widespread unemployment that brought the program into being no longer existed. Congresswoman Leonor Sullivan worked to pass food stamp legislation in the 1950s. In 1961 President Kennedy announced his first executive order to initiate food stamp pilot programs (“A Short History of SNAP,” 2014). In the 60s and 70s fighting

hunger was shaped by the civil rights era, and anti-poverty advocates used the issue of hunger to appeal to the moral consciousness of citizens (Poppendieck, 1997). The television documentary “Hunger in America” helped to popularize the issue as a major social concern (Radimer and Radimer, 2002). Anti-hunger advocacy was led by bipartisan groups, and led to a vast expansion of food assistance programs. School breakfast and lunch programs were expanded, the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Woman, Infants, and Children (WIC) began, and the Food Stamp Program was dramatically reformed and improved (Poppendieck, 1997). The successes of policy reform of the 1970s were undermined by the reduced social spending of the Reagan administration in the 80s, at which point the charitable food organizations and community groups such as food banks, soup kitchens, and churches expanded or began emergency food assistance and free food distribution programs (Radimer and Radimer, 2002). The shrinking of policy programs and expansion of charitable programs transformed the discourse of fighting hunger from a governmental responsibility to a national service project, a charitable endeavor that did not warrant the government’s attention (Poppendieck, 1997). At this point, the United States had still not recognized the human right to food, and was removing the responsibility of addressing hunger away from governing bodies and programs.

The public discourse was transformed once again in the 1990s when the term food insecure replaced hunger in national and international conversations about food. The inclusion of the need for eating socially acceptable food, food that is culturally appropriate and can be acquired without stigmatization, as outlined by LSRO, meant that getting food at food banks and soup kitchens, both emergency food systems, did not

result in food security (Winne, 2009). The increase in use of emergency food in the 80s and the acceptance of the term food security in the public sphere in 1990 led to the need for documentation and measurement of food insecurity in the United States (Radimer & Radimer, 2002). The Food Research and Action Center (FRAC) developed the Community Childhood Hunger Identification Project (CCHIP) to address the need for measurement for policymakers. In 1991, CCHIP was the first nationwide survey to measure childhood hunger (“A History of the Food Insecurity Measure « Food Research & Action Center,” 2014). Research by Kathy Radimer at Cornell in the late 1980s provided a specific set of items to measure food security as well as defined conceptual underpinnings of the experience of food insecurity in the United States (Olson, 1997). The Radimer/Cornell quantitative measures based upon questionnaires were combined with CCHIP instruments to add 58 questions to the 1995 census, and the USDA has measured food security every year since. The inclusion of a food security measure in the census allowed national government policy makers to address the issue more thoroughly, and helped to establish food insecurity and hunger as problems that should be addressed by the government rather than by charities (Olson, 1997).

In 2006, the USDA further distinguished between hunger and food insecurity, in what Patricia Allen (2007) asserts is a political move that subverted the progress made in defining and addressing hunger and food insecurity. The organization differentiates between the two related phenomena stating that food insecurity is a household level economic and social condition while hunger is an individual physiological condition. Today, an 18-question survey is used to measure household food security. Measurements are conducted to quantify food insecurity but not hunger on a scale from high food

security, marginal food security, low food security, to very low food security. The final measurement replaced a previous classification of “food insecurity with hunger” (“USDA Economic Research Service – Measurement,” 2014). This shift in terminology undermines recent successes in addressing food insecurity with national policy, “The new terminology defuses the outrage that the term hunger elicits while disrupting the social progress that has been made over the last few decades as the term food security was developed and put into use” (Allen, 2007, p. 19). Thus, the government thwarts progress made in the conceptualization, measurement, and addressing of food insecurity and hunger. I use the term food security in my thesis because it encompasses a broader understanding of issues of food access in the United States, one of which is hunger. However, I do not mean that food insecurity does not include hunger, and the separation of hunger and food insecurity in national policy is important to note in order to understand how the issue of food insecurity is being addressed.

The importance of the national food safety net should not be underestimated. Despite their limitations, there are multiple national government funded programs addressing the issues of hunger and food insecurity. Food distribution programs include: Commodity Supplemental Food Program (CSFP), Food Distribution Program on Indian Reservations (FDPIR), Nutrition Services Incentive Program (NSIP), and The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP).² Six programs specifically focus on the issue of child nutrition: Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP), Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program (FFVP), National School Lunch Program (NSLP), School Breakfast Program (SBP), Special Milk Program (SMP), and Summer Food Service Program

² It is important to note that providing emergency food does not make people food secure. Food distributions programs act as a band-aid to hunger rather than solutions to food insecurity.

(SFSP). The Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC), Farmers' Market Nutrition Program (FMNP), and Senior Farmers' Market Nutrition Program (SFMNP) focus on specific groups of the population that are vulnerable to food insecurity. The biggest and most widespread program is the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), formerly known as the food stamps program. Finally, the Electronic Benefits Transfer (EBT) program aids in distribution and use of the monetary funds provided by these many programs ("Programs and Services | Food and Nutrition Service," 2014). Addressing justice issues in all of these programs is out of the scope of this thesis, so I will focus on WIC, because it targets women and therefore has the potential to combat the gender divide in food security, and SNAP, because it is the largest program and one of the most important. The above list of programs is evidence that government is working to address food insecurity, and even if it is overlooking a key point of injustice, the necessity of policy efforts should not be devalued.

WIC Works? The Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children

Because the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) specifically addresses women and children, it ostensibly appears to address one issue of justice: the gendered nature of food insecurity. However, the fact that women continue to be more at risk for food insecurity and diet related diseases than men demonstrates that WIC is not quite successful in bridging the gender gap.

Dan Glickman, Secretary of Agriculture and WIC advocate stated in a 1997 press conference, "WIC works, perhaps better than any government program in existence" (Glickman, 1997). WIC provides supplemental foods directly or through vouchers, health care referrals, and nutritional education for women who are pregnant, breastfeeding, post-

partum, and infants and children up to the age of five who are at nutritional risk. These services are available to participants up to 185 percent of the Federal poverty line. Mothers are also automatically eligible to receive WIC if they already qualify for SNAP benefits, Medicaid, or TANF. The program is administered at the state-level but is federally funded. WIC received 6.8 billion in federal funding for the fiscal year of 2013. Support of the program is based upon the assumption that Glickman's statement is true. His assertion has been backed by significant body of research since the program began in 1972.

Research supporting WIC has shown that pregnant women who participate in WIC give birth to healthier children. Early research focused primarily on the ability for WIC to increase birth weight in newborns (Devaney, Bilheimer, & Schore, 1992). Birth weight is easily quantifiable and a reliable indicator of health outcomes. Barbara Devaney furthered early research by comparing pregnant women participating in WIC's prenatal care programs with Medicaid programs. Devaney (1992) found that for every dollar spent on WIC the state saves between \$1.77 and \$3.13 in Medicaid costs. Additionally, mothers participating in WIC received better prenatal care, had longer gestations, lower rates of neonatal risk, improved maternal health, and gave birth to infants with lower incidence of low birth weight. WIC has also been found to decrease the rate of iron-deficiency anemia in children participating in the program (Devaney et al., 1997). Compared to extensive research around WIC's success in terms of health outcomes, research connecting WIC and food security is limited. Metallinos-Kasaras, Gorgman, Wild, and Kallio (2014) found that participation in WIC positively impacts household food security.

The positive health outcomes, government savings, and increased food security associated with WIC have come into question in recent years. The research surrounding WIC's success has focused on the prenatal program, which accounts for only 11 percent of the all services provided by WIC (Besharov and Germanis, 2000). As Devaney and others showed, the prenatal program does have significant impacts on the diets and health of mothers and positive birth outcomes on newborns. Besharov and Germanis (2000) argue that the program needs to be reevaluated because benefits are only for a small portion of the program and because of bias in the research. They find the most significant weaknesses in the research on WIC to be "(a) selection bias, (b) simultaneity bias, and (c) lack of generalizability" (Besharov and Germanis, 2000, p. 145). Because individuals choose to enroll in WIC, the participants may be self-selecting from an already more advantaged population of the total eligible. In critiquing WIC, it is also important to note that WIC began in 1972, when the main health problem facing food insecure individuals was hunger, while today it is obesity. The low-income population that WIC supports is at high risk for obesity and is increasingly affected by the issue. While overweightness is taken into account when evaluating nutritional risk and obesity is addressed as part of the nutritional counseling that WIC provides, counseling is often not effective in response to childhood and maternal obesity. Additionally, mothers do not have the same perceptions about obesity as healthcare professionals in the program, complicating efforts to address the problem (Chamberlin LA et al., 2002).

These perceptions provide insight into the culture around food for WIC participants, which can ultimately be connected to justice issues of gender inequality in household food security. The fact that WIC addresses specifically women and children

means that the gendered nature of feeding children must be taken into account in assessing the program's ability to promote food security, health, and community. Food can be used as a parenting tool beyond just providing nutrition,

Foods were used to calm, reward, and emotionally nurture their children.

The health care professionals felt, for example, that mothers used food to control their children's behavior by frequently giving their children sugared snacks with low-nutrient density as a reward for good behavior.

Food was also viewed as an affordable way of indulging and expressing affection for their child. (Chamberlin LA et al., 2002)

This understanding and use of food among WIC mothers perpetuates the cycle of obesity, and makes children more at risk to the disease. The use of food by women in the household to navigate parenting and please other family members, often husbands, while neglecting their own nutritional needs (Allen and Sachs, 2013) is reflective of the injustices of the larger patriarchal system. The patriarchal system is not the focus of this thesis or the goal of WIC, but the fact that women are more likely to be affected by food insecurity than men is important to my argument. This inequality is just one injustice against women, and by targeting women WIC should begin to address food insecurity among women.

Unfortunately, critiques of WIC within the last fifteen years point out inconsistencies in the program's success in achieving its goals. Additionally, the use of "women" in the title is somewhat misleading. The program only targets mothers, not all women, making it impossible for WIC to fully address the unequal gender distribution of food insecure individuals, as it is currently understood.

SNAP—Addressing Class but not Access

The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), formerly known as the Food Stamp Program (FSP), is the largest nutritional assistance service in the United States. Eligibility for SNAP is determined mainly by income tests. The gross monthly income of participants cannot be more than 130 percent of the poverty level (“Eligibility,” 2014). Because eligibility is based upon income, SNAP can address low income as a major barrier to food insecurity. Nearly 50 million Americans receive benefits from the program (“SNAP Current Participation – Persons,” 2014). SNAP is funded every five years with the passage of the Farm Bill. Revisions to the bill were just passed on February 7th of this year. It is a \$956.4 billion dollar bill, and a vast majority of the funding is allocated to SNAP and nutrition programs (Plumer, 2014). The current bill cuts 8.6 billion dollars in SNAP funding while increasing funding to emergency food outlets through TEFAP. The cuts decrease benefits by an average of 90 dollars a month to approximately 850,000 households in 17 states (“Summary of the 2014 Farm Bill Nutrition Title: Includes Bipartisan Improvements to SNAP While Excluding Harsh House Provisions — Center on Budget and Policy Priorities,” 2014). While these are small cuts to the overall bill, the fact that a program working to alleviate food insecurity in the long term is facing funding cuts while food banks that only address hunger in the short term are getting more funding is indicative of a larger problem. It suggests that the current policy focus in the United States is not on solving the problem of food insecurity and everything that comes along with it, but rather supports a network that acts only as a band-aid to an immediate lack of food. While food banks and emergency food outlets are necessary part of the existing food system to keep people from going to bed hungry, they

are not working to address root causes of food insecurity. The 2014 Farm Bill demonstrates, once again, that the government refuses to acknowledge and provide real solutions to food insecurity.

Increased funding for SNAP in the Farm Bill is necessary because the SNAP program is successfully functioning to ameliorate food insecurity for participants. The self-selection effect has caused some confusion in the effectiveness of the program. That is, people who are more food insecure are more likely to enroll themselves in SNAP, making it difficult to assess the program's effectiveness (Nord and Golla, 2010). Gunderson and Olivera (2001) established a framework to address the selection bias, and then found that food stamp recipients had the same changes of food insecurity as non-recipients. When research controls for the self-selection effect the success of SNAP is made clear. Receiving SNAP reduces the changes of being food insecure by 30 percent and of being very food insecure by 20 percent (Ratcliffe and McKernan, 2010). Research conducted by the United States Department of Agriculture found SNAP to reduce very low food security by slightly more, almost one-third (Nord and Golla, 2010). The highest estimate for SNAP's ability to reduce food insecurity is up to 50 percent (Nord, 2012), although this is inconsistent with other data. Ultimately, SNAP is working for some, even if the ameliorative effect is moderate. The effect it does have makes it an essential program, and one that needs to continue to be fully funded. The following chapter will further demonstrate the possibility for SNAP to work depending upon issues of access.

Chapter Three—Living on SNAP: Contingencies of Success

This chapter of my thesis explores the lived experience of eating on food assistance programs in Los Angeles. As part of my research I simulated living on the SNAP budget, an average of four dollars a day, for one month. The purpose of the simulation was to experience the way in which food access and availability functions for the over 5 million people in California who are living on food assistance. My own participatory research of living on the average SNAP budget functions as evidence of the ability for government programs to provide food security and health. However, it is also evidence that this ability is contingent upon the fact that people who are food insecure have access to SNAP and food retail options that accept SNAP or EBT, and that those retail options provide healthy, fresh, and culturally appropriate options. Ultimately, SNAP works if issues of justice have already been addressed through some other avenue. My participatory research highlights the potential for SNAP to be successful given its provision of financial capital, but the inability SNAP to address inequality in the food system.

Eating on four dollars a day

This participatory research can apply directly to the Los Angeles area, and considers the possibilities and limitations of achieving food security through food assistance programs in other parts of the country through a theoretical application of my research in California. Ultimately, I successfully lived on the SNAP budget for a month without sacrificing my health. By success, I mean that I was able to feed myself fresh foods of my choosing without sacrificing my health. This success was due to a multitude

of factors including my geographical location in southern California, my education and knowledge of nutrition and cooking, the time I had available to shop and cook, as well as the existing systems promoting food security in the Los Angeles area. Additionally, I am single with no children, I have access to transportation by bike or car, I have no significant health problems, and I have no dietary restrictions other than the fact that I am a vegetarian.

The success of my SNAP simulation was due to the intersection of a multiplicity of factors. These factors need to be explored through the food justice perspective in order to understand the social issues affecting food security in the United States. Food justice can be defined broadly “as ensuring that the benefits and risks of where, what, and how food is grown and produced, transported and distributed, and accessed and eaten are shared fairly” (Gottlieb 2010, p. 6) This characterization of food justice allows it to be applied to many situations and communities. The fairness of distribution, access, and eating are useful concepts for the purposes of understanding why the SNAP simulation was successful for me given my positionality. Food justice can be further characterized as placing “the need for food security—access to healthy, affordable, and culturally appropriate food—in the contexts of institutional racism, racial formation, and racialized geographies” (Alkon and Norgaard, 2009). The direct application of food justice to food security is necessary in the context of this paper. Food justice explores food security within the social, institutional, and political contexts explaining who has the ability to be food secure. The food justice movement attempts to promote food security for all people given the context of racialization within the food system. I apply the concepts of the food justice movement to my analysis of the SNAP simulation, because the success of the

project was dependent upon geography, access, and knowledge that are a result of my whiteness and how that classification is played out in the institutionalized racism of the food system.

As a student receiving work-study, a federally funded job program for college students with demonstrated financial need, I could legally qualify for SNAP benefits. However, I chose not to apply for SNAP as part of this research because it felt like I would be taking advantage of the system. Instead, I simulated receiving SNAP benefits as closely as possible. I limited my food spending to 4 dollars a day, and only shopped for food at grocers and farmers markets that accepted EBT. I began this as if I had nothing; no food items already in the house. I had to buy any oil I used to cook, and any spices I wanted to use. At this point it became clear the importance of having culturally appropriate food as an aspect of food security; it seemed useless to be able to buy food if I would cook it and it would have no taste. For me, culturally appropriate food meant having meals that tasted good. The first day I went to Sprouts Market, and there was able to buy spice in bulk, allowing me to significantly reduce the cost of spices as well as the amount I purchased. The availability of bulk spices is not something that is widely accessible. At Sprouts I was also able to purchase brown rice in bulk for 99 cents a pound, dried beans, and a dried legume soup mixture. I found myself worried about purchases in a way I never had to worry before. I weighed every purchase of bulk items I bought, and calculated the prices as I went through the grocery store. That was the only shopping I did for the week, and I was careful not to spend more than 28 dollars a week. For the first week I bought brown rice, beans, legume soup mixture, a small bottle of olive oil, garlic salt, curry powder, two onions, a head of broccoli, a yam, a butternut

squash, six organic eggs, a loaf of bread, and a jar of peanut butter. It all totaled 26 dollars.

As the first week went on, I found the most difficult part of living on the SNAP budget was the possibility that food might run out. I was worried about eating too much because I did not want to be lacking in food later in the week. I worried about snacking, or having too large a meal that would limit my consumption later on. There were moments when I came home from school hungry and felt like I had to immediately eat something, and moments when I chose to stop eating as soon as I felt even slightly full for fear of running out of food in the future. Generally, I was able to function normally. I could go running in the morning or afternoon, I went to school easily, and I felt a normal amount of fatigue for a senior in college. While limited funds for food did not physically affect me, the psychological worry did. My days revolved around food. When I left the house in the morning I had to pack a lunch because there was no possibility for me to purchase any meals. If I wanted to have beans, one of the most filling and healthy items I was able to purchase, I had to plan to soak them the night before and have an hour to cook them for dinner or lunch. On a few nights for dinner I ate toast and peanut butter. This was easy enough for me to do as an unmarried college student, but if I had children would I want to feed them toast and peanut butter for dinner? Probably not.

One of the most efficient and healthy ways to spend money was at farmers markets. However, not all markets accept EBT, which is the way all SNAP benefits are distributed. The farmers market in Pomona, CA, was the closest market to my home that accepts EBT, CalFresh (California's SNAP), and WIC. I was able to visit this market because I own a bike and have access to car. I could also take public transportation.

While the Pomona farmers' market is significantly smaller than the Claremont market, it is also significantly cheaper. The first time I visited I was able to buy a dozen eggs, dinosaur kale, broccoli, beets, an onion, carrots, celery, lettuce, two small avocados, three zucchini, and a loaf of whole-wheat flax seed bread for only 18 dollars. I also visited the Atwater Village farmers' market in Los Angeles. There, I spent 20 dollars on beets, kale, broccoli, bread, an onion, a head of garlic, an Asian pear, an apple, a dozen eggs, and an avocado. The Atwater farmers market is located in an affluent neighborhood of Los Angeles, and although it accepts SNAP, WIC, and EBT, the market services only about five to ten shoppers per week using government assistance. This demographic is vastly different from the Watts farmers market, where consumers are nearly all WIC beneficiaries (Quattrochi, Interview, February 23, 2014). The acceptance of EBT at farmers markets is highly valuable in the promotion of food security, but problems arise when food insecure individuals or families are not eligible because they are undocumented immigrants, as is the case in many parts of Los Angeles.

Staying healthy on food assistance: location, time, and education

The fact that I successfully ate for a month spending only 112 dollars does not mean that the public policy food safety net in America is categorically a success. Additionally, that fact that I ate healthily during this month does not mean that receiving SNAP or other nutritional assistance benefits allows all families to obtain and eat healthy food. My ability to eat healthily on the SNAP budget was due to a multitude of factors, most importantly my geographical location in Southern California, the time I could contribute to the entire food process, and my knowledge about food, cooking, and health.

Living in Southern California means that I had access to fresh, locally grown, food in the middle of February. It means that there are farmers markets open year round. This was a critical factor in my success, because I was able to buy food very cheaply at farmers markets. According to the USDA, in 2012 winter farmers markets accounted for only 24 percent of the total 7,865 markets listed by the department (“More Communities Warm Up to Winter Markets | USDA Newsroom,” 2014). If I had been in my hometown in Massachusetts, I would have had to travel at least two hours by public transportation to reach a winter farmers’ market. Even if I had the time to travel that far, the fresh produce available during a New England winter would no doubt be limited.

As a young, unmarried, and childless student I had the time, energy, and willingness to commit to getting and preparing healthy food for myself each day. Being committed only to myself allowed me to create space in my schedule to bike 20 minutes to a grocery store, spend an hour shopping and searching for the best deals, and bike 20 minutes home. My access to a car allowed me to drive to farmers markets in the inland empire and in Los Angeles. It allowed me drive to the grocery store when it was pouring rain. Having a flexible schedule allowed me to spend an hour or more boiling beans at night for dinner. It gave me time in the morning to pack a sandwich or leftovers for lunch. It gave me the ability to plan for the week. It is important to remember also, that my goal was to be healthy through my eating habits. This may not be the goal of all people receiving nutritional assistance.

Finally, I could realistically achieve this goal because of my knowledge about food and nutrition. I know how to soak beans overnight and cook them so that they taste good. I know where to pick herbs on the street to add to these beans or to vegetables for a

pasta sauce. I know that beans and brown rice make a complete protein. I know that unsaturated fats are better for you and that a small jar of olive oil will last longer than butter. I know that I can use the beets and the beet greens. I can make up a recipe for a beet burger. Even if I didn't have cooking skills, I have access to a computer where I could find a recipe for anything. A computer also made it possible for me to find farmers markets and grocery stores that accept SNAP and EBT. Even if I did not have my own preexisting knowledge, my computer acted as an endless resource and educational tool to learn about food, cooking, and nutrition. The USDA has a recipe database as part of their SNAP education program that allows users to search by ingredient for recipes that are affordable and healthy. But access to a computer and internet is yet another result of privilege and monetary wealth.

Appropriate and Acceptable

The concept that food needs to be appropriate and obtained in a socially acceptable manner was particularly important to my participatory exploration of food security. As I stated earlier, culturally appropriate food for me came to mean food that tastes good. I also began to realize the importance that sharing food had for me. Worrying about whether or not my food would last the week or month made it impossible for me to share anything I had with others. I also did not take any food that anyone offered to share with me, because doing so would not have been realistic simply because most people using SNAP are not surrounded by college students who are constantly sharing their overabundance food. Additionally, free food is often available through the college, a privilege most people on SNAP do not have access to. The inability to share was one of the most challenging aspects of simulating the SNAP budget. The culture and community

that I am part of is truly built around sharing food. This, of course, is a reflection of the fact that I attend a small liberal arts college, live off campus, and have the ability and time to share food with friends. While this is a highly privileged position, it does point to the fact that food—cooking, eating, and sharing—is a powerful motivator in building and sustaining community. The inability to share broke down the forces that create my community, so while SNAP provided me with adequate food because of my access to healthy food systems, it did not provide me with ability to use food for the power of establishing community and social bonds. I hypothesize that over time my ability to build social capital would be constricted because of my inability to share food.

Chapter Four—The Struggle for Equity in Community Food Projects

The fact that low-income people, women, African Americans and Latinos are more likely to be food insecure, as I established in chapter one, is evidence that indicates that the government has failed to achieve justice in food security through the national safety net. At the same time, alternatives to the industrial food system such as community gardens, urban agriculture, farmers markets, and community supported agriculture (CSA) cooperatives that exist in the alternative food movement as local, organic, and sustainable do not necessarily solve food insecurity or injustices either. Many of these bottom-up solutions began as methods of change to create a food system outside the industrial, energy intensive, unsustainable system that exists in the United States (Winne, 2009). As I have previously described, until the community food security movement merged with environmental justice movement to create the food justice movement these food projects did not address food insecurity. However, the basis for the food justice movement is a call for equity in alternative food, not for equity in food security. It is not until community food projects shift from being simply alternative food systems to being solutions to food insecurity based upon the location and way that they are implemented that food justice is also food security justice. Even if all people at all times had access to healthy food and the purchasing power to feed their families, community organizing to provide food would continue to occur because these solutions provide benefits beyond simply supplying food. Where large government policy safety nets supplement financial capital and give people purchasing power, community food projects sustainably provide healthy and fresh food as an alternative to industrial food (Allen, 1999; Gottlieb & Fisher, 2000), create new economic spaces (Allen, 1999; Gottlieb, 2010), as well as produce

social capital (“Yotti” Kingsley & Townsend, 2006; Alaimo, Reischl, & Allen, 2010) and community cohesion in both food secure and food insecure communities.

As I noted in the introduction, I use community to mean a group of people living in the same geographical space who are linked by social ties, common perspectives, actions, or goals (MacQueen et al., 2001). Community cohesion is based on individuals and notions of individual social capital (Arthur and Davies, 2010) and occurs when strong positive relationships are developed between people of different backgrounds (Local Government Association (England and Wales), 2002). I use Robert Putnam’s (2000) definition of social capital as individual connection to social networks and the trust and reciprocity that arises in those networks. Because community cohesion is based upon social capital, I use the creation of social capital as an indicator for community cohesion. Putnam (2000) finds that increasing social capital is related to safer neighborhoods and decline in social capital can lead to unsafe neighborhoods and reduced economic prosperity. Thus, creation of social capital through community food projects is indicative of community cohesion and neighborhood safety.

In this chapter I specifically look at the way three community-based, non-government, food systems confront injustices in working to ameliorate food security, promote community cohesion, and create new economic spaces. While all three are successful in supporting the people in the communities that they serve, only community gardens and farmers’ markets are able to address issues of food insecurity because they can successfully serve food insecure, low-income communities in ways that community supported agriculture does not. Before delving into these three community food projects,

I argue for the importance of community cohesion and new economic spaces in the promotion of food security.

Transformative Potential of Community Food

The transformative power of both the economic and community cohesion aspects of community food projects is dependant upon the community's participation in such projects. However, if projects are backed by the support of the community they are valuable methods of improving food security. In food insecure settings non-industrial food systems are often created with the goal of achieving community food security. Community-based solutions are often most successful with the support and involvement of local government, as I will show in chapter five, but they do not always take place with that support. Whether or not they occur with governmental support, the shift in focus from purely political solutions, such as WIC and SNAP, to community based ones, results in citizens participating in concrete projects with visible impacts (Allen, 1999). It expands the goals of solutions beyond hunger and food security to education, business skill development, environmental preservation, job training, and community revitalization (Gottlieb and Fisher, 2000). Such expansion has the potential to completely transform a community's cohesiveness through the creation of social capital. A significant body of work finds that social capital is inversely related to food insecurity. That is, when social capital is high, food insecurity is lower (Martin et al., 2004; Walker et al., 2007; Winne, 2009). If community food projects can create social capital, they can improve community cohesiveness and in doing so also help to ameliorate food insecurity. When this is achieved, both the food systems and social networks of the community are transformed.

Community-based food production and distribution systems can also be transformative to economies by creating new economic spaces that act as alternatives to corporate and international food system (Gottlieb and Fisher, 2000). Jane Dixon (2012) describes the ways in which economies can completely change due to shifts the food system to “community initiated economies based on food production” (p. 171). Community food systems also provide solutions outside of the government safety net, which is sometimes categorized as dependence and can come with a social stigma. Importantly, community-based solutions move food security and health from being pre-determined by a larger system to self-determined. Community food systems acknowledge the importance of both food assistance programs and charity. “But by emphasizing community development and empowerment strategies for individuals as community participants, it seeks more systemic, structural change in the food system at the community level to more effectively create the conditions of self-reliance” (Gottlieb and Fisher, 2000, p. 19). Thus, community food systems allow individuals to have agency within the food system as opposed to being subject to the pre-determined structures of the industrial food system. Gottlieb and Fisher (2000) point out that community food systems also act as point of resistance to change the structure of the food system that has led to the injustices determining food security. The fact that the creation of new economic spaces through community food projects also creates self-reliance allows individuals to achieve food security without the threat of stigma and instead through modes of empowerment. Dixon (2012) argues that community initiated economies are not necessarily anti-capitalist, as they could easily seem, but can add to the diversity of economies and thus be potentially transformative.

Community Gardens

Community gardens have the potential to be one of the most transformative food projects. The history of community gardens provides evidence of their transformative power, and hope for their future. A community garden is a plot of land farmed collectively by a group of people. The land is often divided into independent plots where individuals or families can grow crops of their choosing. Often, cultivated land was once vacant lots, owned privately or by the city. In contrast to top-down solutions to food insecurity by the government, community gardens are a grassroots, collaborative efforts to grow food in a given community (Okvat 2011). Unused land in urban areas provides an ideal location for community gardens; a place where people have been coming together in acts of resistance, outreach, environmental ethic, and pleasure since the 1890s. At that time, gardens were a source of labor for the unemployed as well as civic beautification. During World War I community and backyard gardens were used to augment national food supply in order send more overseas. During the Great Depression community gardens provided food and jobs. Over 23 million households had subsistence garden plots and produced produce valued at 36 million dollars. During World War II gardens were again used for nationalistic purposes, as victory gardens rallied community morale and allowed more food to be sent overseas to support the war effort (Lawson 2005). Today, community gardens across the country are used for food, employment, education, enjoyment, and as a safe space for people to come together. In food insecure areas, community gardens can work to promote food security and community cohesiveness by bringing neighborhoods together across race (Shinew, Glover, and Parry, 2004) generations, cultures, and diverse historical backgrounds.

Participating in a community garden can dramatically increase the health and food security of gardeners and family members. In a community-based participatory research study of Hispanic migrant farmworkers and their families in the Oregon valley, a community garden project resulted in a four-fold increase of vegetable intake among adults and three-fold intake among children. Additionally, the rate of food insecurity dropped from 31 percent of respondents before participation in the community garden to 3 percent after (Carney et al., 2011). Patricia Allen (1999) argues that the formation of community gardens needs to be a part of reshaping the food safety net. They are way for individuals to take control of the source of their food and ensure their own food security rather than relying on public assistance safety nets. Allen (1999) also recognizes the ability for community gardens to provide relief in the inner city and bring people together across generation and cultures, an ability that promotes community cohesiveness.

The importance of community gardens extends far beyond the promotion of food security. From the creation to cultivation of the garden, community gardens have the potential to bring people together around a common goal. In many cities community gardening organizations only provide support once a group has already formed. This initial formation requires that community members come together in a common goal. However, the most valuable benefits of the community garden occur once the land is being cultivated. As members work together they can more easily identify problems within the community and find solutions (Hanna and Oh 2000). Community gardens also work to bring people together cross culturally and cross generationally through labor and the creation of a safe space (Allen, 1999; Schmelzkopf, 1995; Beals, Interview, March 3, 2014). The garden is a place for mentorship between young and old, a place to spend time

off the streets, and a place to educate about nutrition, gardening, and the environment. As a result of these functions, and as a mechanism to get kids off the street, community gardens reduce crime rates (Beals, Interview, March 3, 2014). During the 1970s, city dwellers transformed vacant lots that were sites of crime and trash into urban gardens in a collective effort to reject the rising crime rates and feeling of abandonment by politicians (Tidball and Krasney, 2007). Urban greenspaces reduce rates of both property and violent crimes (Kuo and Sullivan, 2001). The ability for community gardens to take people off the streets, to increase the consumption of fresh produce, to provide safe spaces for multicultural and multigenerational communication makes them invaluable resources in the promotion of food security. Not only do they provide access to healthy, fresh, and culturally appropriate food, but they also foster a sense of community in doing so.

Community gardens can be a location to create and foster social capital. A study done in Flint, Michigan found that participation in a community garden created social capital and improved health outcomes for members who participated, but did not have the same effects for people who did not participate (Alaimo, Reischl, and Allen, 2010). This finding seems logical, and points to the fact that the benefits of community cohesion may be limited to the participants in the garden. These findings are supported by research done in Ontario, Canada (Glover, 2004), and Melbourne, Australia (“Yotti” Kingsley and Townsend, 2006). In research done in California, building social capital and organizing around other community issues were found to be important benefits of community gardens (Twiss et al., 2003). Ultimately, the community garden is a valuable starting point to build social capital neighborhoods, and therefore promote community cohesion. As an economic space, community gardens can completely depart from the traditional

economic framework of the food system, creating a location to grow food and therefore remove the need to participate in the industrial food system (Gottlieb & Fisher, 2000; Allen, 1999; Gottlieb, 2010).

The success of community gardens cannot be taken at face value. It is only when community gardens are located in low-income neighborhoods with limited food access and food insecurity that they have the ability to confront injustices in food system. Just as simply providing SNAP benefits does not lead to food security if issues of access are not addressed, building a community garden does not create food security unless it is located in a place that previously had limited access to fresh food systems. Their role in creating community cohesion and as an alternative to the industrial food system should not be diminished even if they are located in food secure areas. Such an alternative can be viewed as another kind of justice in the food system, but not justice in food security. It is also important to note that community cohesion is dependent upon bringing diverse people together, a potential benefit of community gardens but not an inherent one. The garden can sometimes take the form of an exclusive project, where only certain members of the community can participate (Glover, 2004). For example, in the Watts Community Garden in Los Angeles the entire population of gardeners is Latino (Beals, Interview, March 3, 2014), making social capital bonds happen between an insular sub-population of a community that also has a large African-American population. As I will discuss in chapter five, this garden is very successful and is providing many benefits to the community in which it is situated, but it is also an example of the possible limitations of community gardens. Ultimately, the success of any community garden is contingent upon the commitment of local leadership and involvement of the community members and

partners (Twiss et al., 2003). I would also hypothesize that their success in promoting community cohesion depends on who has access to the social capital created by the garden. Simply, community gardens need to be backed by the community.

Farmers' Markets

Farmers' markets function both in and out of the national food safety net. They are an alternative economic space in their ability to support local farmers and provide options for food outside of major grocery store chains and the industrial agriculture system, but some also work within the government safety net by accepting EBT benefits. This duality makes them a critical source of food security promotion because they are able to work in communities and produce positive outcomes for the community while also utilizing the economic resources provided by government systems. Farmers' markets exemplify the need for, and success attained by, cooperation between government policy solutions to food insecurity and community-based non-policy solutions.

In addition to providing fresh produce, farmers' markets promote a sense of community and create a space for social activity and congregation. In a review of literature on farmers' markets impacts, Brown and Miller (2008) found that social interactions at markets made them important locations in the community, alluding to the fact that the creation of social capital at markets has benefits for the greater community. At the same time, markets are a crucial point of food distribution and fresh food access in low-income and food insecure areas, particularly when they are able to accept EBT benefits. All of the community organizers and policy advocates in LA who I interviewed cited an increase in markets that accept EBT as an important source of improving food security. This is reiterated by research citing the need for EBT at farmers' markets to

increase access to federal food assistance beneficiaries (Jones and Bhatia, 2011) the importance of the Farmers' Market Nutrition Program in helping improve diet and health of WIC participants (Kropf et al., 2007), and the ability of markets to increase access to fresh food when located in low-income areas (McCormack et al., 2010). Beyond the immediate neighborhood, farmers' markets help to reconnect urban consumers with their food and can potentially break down the urban-rural divide (King, 2008), impacting a broader community of people and creating larger networks of social capital.

Farmers' markets face a few major barriers in their ability to promote food security: their prevalence in high-income neighborhoods, the perceived high cost of fresh produce, and the inability for all markets to accept food assistance. Andy Fisher (1999) in his report "Hot Peppers and Parking Lot Peaches: Evaluating Farmers' Markets in Low Income Communities," cites community organizing as essential to the success of markets in low income neighborhoods because it provides a sense of ownership over the market. Subsidizing markets through the Farmers' Market Nutrition Program, affordability, implementing EBT systems, hiring community members, transportation, and consumer education are also key components of success (Fisher, 1999). Farmers' markets have been critiqued as part of an alternative food system that reproduces white privilege (Slocum, 2007). This is a particularly important issue because markets in low-income areas are often serving non-white populations. Markets will be more successful in promoting food security when located in areas that are food insecure, areas without access to fresh produce, and when then are able to accept EBT and SNAP.

Community Supported Agriculture

Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) systems work by individuals buying shares of fresh produce from a farmer. They bring together producers and consumers for mutual benefit (King, 2008). In doing so, both the farmer and consumer share the risks and benefits of food production. One of the main successes of CSAs is that they “reflect the culture of the community they serve” (King, 2008, 117) and therefore have the ability to change over time depending upon community needs. Unfortunately, the benefits of community supported agriculture (CSA) as new economic spaces and food distribution systems are often limited to upper class Caucasians (Allen, 1999). CSAs are less likely to occur in areas with high poverty rates, and more likely to be in counties with higher rates of whites, Asians, or Latinos. Counties with CSAs also have a higher average education level than counties without CSAs (Schnell, 2007). The demographic shortfalls found in community supported agriculture initiatives reflect the larger critique of the food justice and alternative food movements. CSAs, while successful in supporting local farmers, business, and affluent white communities, fail to address issues of food insecurity and health related diseases of low-income, minority communities. Community supported agriculture has yet to make the shift from a community food project as part of the alternative food movement to a food security solution.

* * *

Community food projects can promote food security in two ways: through increasing access to food and creating social capital. They have the added social and economic benefit of creating new economic space outside the industrial food system, an economic space that allows for self-reliance and agency rather than dependence. When implemented in the right location and with enough community support, community food

projects can address issues of injustice in food security. This incredible potential, while not always realized, makes community food a critical point on which to focus solutions to food insecurity, and as projects that can be the beginning of broader systematic change.

Chapter Five—The Gangs and Gardens of Los Angeles

In the previous chapters I have argued that the government food safety net is a necessary tool to promote household food security and health, but limited in its ability to address injustices that are determinants of food security. I have argued that where national government programs fail, community food security efforts can succeed by providing an alternative to the industrial food system and producing added benefits to the community beyond food security and health, mainly, the promotion of community cohesion and the creation new economic spaces. I will now explore the way policy solutions, both national and local, and community-based solutions are working in Los Angeles. The capacity for community cohesion as a result of community food projects and the link between social capital and food security is particularly interesting to explore via the narrative constructing a connection between gang violence and food insecurity. Through this narrative I assess solutions to food insecurity.

Locating the Narrative

Ron Finley, a guerilla gardener in South Central Los Angeles “envisions a world where gardening is gangsta” (“Meet Ron Finley. | Ron Finley,” 2014). In a TED talk he gave last year Finley said, “We gotta flip the script on what a gangsta is — if you ain’t a gardener, you ain’t gangsta” (Finley, 2013). In many ways, Finley’s catchy rhetoric reflects the heart of the narrative between food insecurity and gangs in Los Angeles. In this narrative, lack of food is connected to gang violence, and solutions to gang violence use food. It is a narrative found in the voices of gang members, in the community organizers advocating in city hall, and in the media.

Gang members often cite hunger and lack of food as a reason for becoming involved in illegal activity that ultimately results in violence. In Operation Fly Trap: L.A. Gangs, Drugs, and the Law author Susan Phillips (2012) quotes multiple gang members using the narrative of feeding families as justification for their actions. Their voices reiterate over and over, “Any man, he is not to watch his family starve. No matter what he got to do”(p. 60), and “This is how they get they money to feed they family: they hustle” (p. 60). Phillips (2012) writes, “The hardworking mom accepts dirty money into her house because it helps to feed her family” (p. 66). The drug trade is used to fill an economic vacuum in Los Angeles, a vacuum that has made hunger a very real experience for citizens. The words of gang members quoted in Operation Fly Trap demonstrate how gang members justify participation using the narrative of feeding family.

In solutions to food insecurity the narrative shifts to argue that different solutions help reduce crime and gang violence. Julie Beals, director of the LA Community Garden Council, cited the ability of community gardens to reduce gang violence as a powerful advocacy tool in city hall (Beals, Interview, March 3, 2014) in my interview with her. She noted that gardens are able reduce crime through bringing people together across generations and cultures (Beals, Interview, March 3, 2014). Beals’ use of the narrative is directed towards the city council as a way to get legislation supporting community gardens passed. However, this narrative is reiterated by the media and through the media reaches the public. One of the best examples of the connection between gang and solutions to food insecurity in the media was the coverage of the transformation of a Glassell Park home that was a center for gang activity to a community garden. The home on Drew Street was leveled following a firefight between the Drew Street gang and

police in 2008, and converted into a garden in 2011 (Woodward, 2013). When the garden project began, the *LA Times* published an article titled “Seeds of hope to planted in Los Angeles’ notorious Drew Street neighborhood,” a headline that conveys the message of food security as a solution to gangs to the public. The narrative is also embedded in news stories that following the destruction of the South Central Farm in 2007, an event that was depicted as also the destruction of a refuge for youth from gang violence (Pierra-Avila, 2007; Patel, 2008). In 2010, the narrative reappeared again in radio coverage of the fight for the land formerly occupied by the South Central Farm. Journalist Doris Quintanilla, for Southern California Public Radio, quoted community organizer Danny Santana saying, the garden “was important to me because I grew up in a gang environment, and the farm gave me somewhere not just to go as an alternative but it gave me real reason to stand for something” (Quintanilla, 2010). Santana’s words provide support for the narrative directed at policy makers from a community member, and demonstrate that the narrative of food as solution to gangs appears from both gardeners and policy advocates.

The stories told by gang members, policy advocates, community organizers, and the media portray the connection between food and gangs in two ways: lack of food either leads to crime or community gardens stop crime. Finley’s rhetoric is an attempt to shift this narrative. Rather than food being portrayed as either the problem or the solution and gangs always being depicted as a problem, Finley transforms the words to portray a solution to both the problem of gangs and the problem of food insecurity. Ultimately, the ability of solutions to food insecurity to address both lack of food and crime is the important lesson from Los Angeles’ narrative.

The connection between food insecurity and gang violence is dependent upon an assumption that food insecurity leads to violence. Thus far, I have only demonstrated a relationship between community food projects and the creation of social capital. In this chapter I outline the connection between food security and violence and conflict abroad, and then use Los Angeles as a case study to understand the existing narrative of that connection on a local level. While the correlation between food insecurity and conflict has been established on an international level (Messer, Cohen, and Marchione, 2001; Bora et al. 2010; Tusiime, Renard, and Smets, 2013; FAO, 2000; Seddon and Adhikari, 2003; and Cohen and Pinstrip-Anderson, 1999), it has received little attention within the United States. I argue that Los Angeles provides an example of the coexistence of food insecurity and violence, if not a correlation, and that because of this coexistence solutions to food insecurity can address both issues.

Food Security and Violence

While the food justice movement and literature has placed the alternative food movement into a food security framework and brought focus to a need for justice in community food projects, little research has been done on how food security or insecurity affects communities in United States. However, a body of work focuses on food insecurity and social unrest and conflict in areas outside the United States. I first explore the established connection between food and culture as a jumping off point to understand how food affects community identity assertion. I then review the existing literature that connects food insecurity with social organization, conflict, and violence. This literature suggests that food insecurity has broader negative impacts on community beyond individual health.

Extensive literature has been written about the connection between food and culture. Margaret Visser (1999) states that in North America today, food is about efficiency, technology, individualism, a sense of choice, and time. Despite this, meals are still and have always been “an essential medium for social sharing and relationship” (Visser, 1999, p 123). So while the importance of social interaction has not diminished, the consumption of food reflects the consumer culture in the United States. Massimo Montanari (2006) argues that not only are food and culture connected, but that food actually *is* culture. He states that this happens in three different stages: “when it is produced” because people create their own food, “when it is prepared” because it transforms food and marks humans as civilized, and “when it is eaten” because people choose their own foods specific to economics, nutrients, or symbolic values. The processes of producing, preparing, and consuming food establish and reinforce cultural values and community practices. Throughout history, eating has been equated with community and belonging, “On all social levels sharing a table is the first sign of membership in a group. That might be the family but also a broader community—each brotherhood, guild, or association reasserts its own collective identity at the table” (Montanari, 2006, p. 94). The creation of community is much more complex than simply sharing food, but the role of food in asserting collective identity is an important beginning to understanding how food insecurity affects community well-being.

Community well-being is also impacted by how culture affects the ways in which food security is viewed and experienced. Joseph Monlar (1999) explores the way culture and social organization determines food security and can be used to address policy issues associated with food insecurity. He identifies culture as “values, beliefs, traditions, and

attitudes” (p. 489) and social organization as “patterned relationships that structure human action” (p. 489). Both culture and social organization are present in community. The organization, coping mechanisms, and interpretation of food insecurity within communities depend upon the culture and social organization of those communities. Culture, specifically in relationship to normative gender roles, has been associated with individual and household food security (Monlar, 1999; Pottier, 1999). Mothers are viewed as responsible for feeding the family, and often sacrifice their own bodies and health in order to feed their children. In the process of feeding the family, social order is constructed and reinforced (Allen and Sachs, 2013). Women are both responsible for keeping their families food secure and at risk for being food insecure themselves due to this responsibility. As stated in chapter two, this is particularly important in the evaluation of the Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC). The relationship between food security and social organization is important for the exploration of food policies in the United States. Monlar (1999) writes, “Defects in social organization undermine food security; in turn, widespread hunger has corrosive effects on social organization” (p. 492). While the issue in the United States may not specifically be widespread hunger or famine as it is experienced in other countries (Riches, 1997), Monlar’s assertion helps to unpack the experience of food insecurity in communities.

The established connection between armed conflict and food insecurity on an international level (Messer, Cohen, and Marchione, 2001; Bora et al. 2010; Tusiime, Renard, and Smets, 2013; FAO, 2000; Seddon and Adhikari, 2003; and Cohen and Pinstrip-Anderson, 1999) can also provide some insight into how food insecurity affects

communities through violence. Food insecurity can be both a result and cause of violence. In areas affected by conflict, violence, and war, farming populations are reduced, emergency food supplies are used and often pillaged, and markets and infrastructure distributing food and providing economic stability are disrupted. Additionally, food is often used as a weapon in war (Cohen and Pinstrip-Anderson, 1999). From the other direction, “hunger causes conflict when people feel they have nothing more to lose and so are willing to fight for resources, political power, and cultural respect.” (Cohen and Pinstrip-Anderson, 1999, p. 384). Messer and her colleagues (2001) examine how hunger can be both a cause and effect of conflict, supporting Cohen and Pinstrip-Anderson’s assertions with evidence in many countries in Africa. They argue that sustainable agriculture and rural development can prevent conflict in resource poor areas (Messer, Cohen, and Marchione 2001). A study done in South Africa found that societal violence was a cause of food insecurity and that fostering social networks could help improve food security status (Lemke et al., 2003). The Food and Agriculture organization of the United Nations also cites conflict as a main cause of food insecurity in the Horn of Africa (FAO, 2000). While the connection between food insecurity, hunger, and violence is well established on the nation-state scale, and within areas facing widespread violence across a population, this connection is not well established within smaller communities.

The connection between food insecurity and social unrest and conflict on an international scale could potentially provide valuable insight to apply to smaller food insecure communities, but there is currently a gap in the scholarship addressing this issue. If food insecurity can cause war within a country, might it also cause violence within a

city? Or within a smaller sub-population of a city? The areas of Los Angeles that are most food insecure are also the areas that have high rates of violence and large gang prevalence.

One article on North America by Hamelin, Habicht, and Beaudry (1999) finds that food insecurity at the household level has multiple consequences on the broader environment to which the household belongs. The authors describe these consequences as social implications. Physical, psychological, and sociofamilial consequences of food insecurity on the household level all have social repercussions. Physical manifestations of hunger, fatigue, and illness can result in decreased social capital and the inability to concentrate at school or work. Psychological suffering stems from the need to go against social norms and existing values in order to eat, as well serious stress within the home. Sociofamilial disruptions can occur within household dynamics, changing eating patterns, and different ways of getting and managing food (Hamelin, Habicht, and Beaudry, 1999). The authors find that these household consequences of food insecurity have broader social implications including impaired learning, erosion of knowledge transfer to the next generation, loss of productivity, increased health care need, amplified process of exclusion and feeling powerless, decreased friendliness, and threatened harmonious community (Hamelin, Habicht, and Beaudry, 1999, p. 527). These social outcomes on the community are important to the assessment of solutions to food insecurity in the United States.

Los Angeles' Dualistic Existence

“Los Angeles cannot permanently exist as two cities – one amazingly prosperous, one increasingly poorer in substance and in hope.” - Mayor Tom Bradley, 1989

* * *

Standing on one corner in South Los Angeles I could walk into a McDonalds, Burger King, KFC, or Taco Bell. This could be any corner in South LA, and those fast food restaurants could be substituted with any other fast food restaurant. This is a place full of easy access to cheap food. Food with limited nutritional value, but loaded with calories, and the fats and sugars that our bodies have evolutionarily evolved to crave. This image of Los Angeles is an ironic counterpoint to the lush and fertile land that once existed here. From the late 1780s until World War II the city was a hub of agriculture (Surls, 2014). Today, the city faces persistent issues of poverty, growing unemployment, food insecurity, hunger, and obesity. Over one million adults in Los Angeles County are food insecure, and 59 percent of adults are obese or overweight (Shimada, 2014). In 2010, the city had one of the highest child food insecurity rates in the country, with 26.6 percent of children found to be food insecure (Feeding America, 2012). At the same time, LA is home to some of the best and healthiest food in the country. It is a city well known for Hollywood, farmers markets, salads, and smoothies. The disparities in food consumption reflect a disparity in wealth. LA has the ninth highest income inequality gap in the nation (Berube, 2014). There are only 10 miles between Hollywood and South Central. The juxtaposition of wealth and poverty, farmers markets and food deserts, obesity and hunger, combined with high rates of gangs and crime, places Los Angeles in an ideal position from which to explore food insecurity and community.

The coexistence of wealth and poverty, health food and fast food, in Los Angeles, though troubling, makes it an ideal location to explore the issues of food, health, and community. The city's geographical location makes it possible for citizens to have access

to fresh and local produce year-round. It also makes opportunities for community solutions to food insecurity more viable options. In theory, the weather in Los Angeles could allow every person to grow his or her own food. While growing your own food is an empowering and radical act, this is an idealistic view of a much more complicated food and societal system. In the following section I outline how white flight out of the City of Los Angeles and into the suburban sprawl simultaneously contributed to violence between gangs and created an environment that produces food insecurity.

Urban Sprawl and the Coexistence of Gang Violence and Food Insecurity

Issues of food insecurity, obesity, and diabetes affect the same populations living in the poorest neighborhoods of LA that are also affected by gang violence. While both the problems of food insecurity and gangs prevalence are related to poverty, they are also related to each other. This relationship, whether causal or just narrative, means that solutions to food insecurity can address both issues of food insecurity and community coherence.

The prevalence of poverty in Los Angeles is a causative factor in both the creation of gangs, the rate of crime, and the level of food insecurity. Eight percent of the census tracts in Los Angeles are concentrated poverty neighborhoods (CPNs), and these neighborhoods have disproportionately high populations of African Americans and Latinos. While low-income areas in the city have historically been Black, the demographics changed in the 1990s with an influx of immigrants from Mexico and Latin America. Neighborhoods in South Los Angeles and Downtown have the highest concentrations of poverty and Black and Latino populations (Matsunaga, 2014). The demographics of Los Angeles come out of institutionalized systems of power that

reproduce structural racism and perpetuate a cycle of poverty in which minority groups are constantly marginalized. These large systems and structures simultaneously caused the formation of gangs, food deserts, and an obesigenic environment.

Los Angeles is known as the gang capitol of the nation. There are 450 active gangs in the city today, with over 45,000 total members. With gangs comes crime, and in the past three years there have been over 16,000 violent crimes directly associated with gangs in the city (LAPD, 2014). Gang formation and gang violence in Los Angeles is a partial result of poverty and unemployment (Kyriacou, 1999). Alejandro A. Alonso (2004) argues that institutionalized racism through school and residential segregation, racial intimidation, and marginalization and exclusion of the rest of LA were the primary causes of early gang formation among African Americans in Los Angeles. He writes that “fear of attack from Whites was widespread and this intimidation led to the early formation of Black social street clubs aimed at protecting Black youths against persistent White violence” (p. 664) in the 1940s. Conflict between these gangs did not occur until the 1960s when white populations began to leave the inner city for the sprawl of the suburbs (Alonso, 2004). This outward migration was part the larger problem of environmental racism (Pulido, 2000).

As racism segregated Angelinos and contributed to the formation of gangs, it also segregated the food system. The 1960s migration of middle- and upper-income primarily white citizens away from city centers resulted in a corresponding supermarket migration, a phenomena known as supermarket redlining (Bassford, Galloway-Gilliam, and Flynn, 2010; Shaffer, 2002). Inaccessibility of supermarkets today is measured through the labeling of “food deserts.” This indicator is quantified by how far residents are from a

supermarket, ½ mile to one mile in urban areas, and the vehicle availability for residents in that area (“USDA Economic Research Service - About the Atlas,” 2014). While the term food desert can be confusing and misleading (it does not mean there is no food just no supermarkets), the lack of supermarkets in certain areas can be useful in understanding the food system and food related health issues in those areas. In neighborhoods where the population is mostly white there is a disproportionately greater number of supermarkets than in predominately African-American or Latino neighborhoods (Shaffer, 2002). The contrast between neighborhoods is remarkable. South LA has only 60 full service grocery stores for over 1.3 million people, while West LA has 57 stores for 650,000 residents. Every store in South LA has to service twice as many customers than in West LA. Additionally, healthy options are far less available in South LA with only three-quarters of all food retail outlets selling fresh produce (Bassford et al., 2010). Those that do only sell about half the selection found in West LA, and produce sold is more likely to be damaged or spoiled. Finally, when fruits and vegetables are available, they are more expensive, despite the lower quality (Bassford et al., 2010).

The lack of supermarkets and large numbers of fast food restaurants contribute to an obesigenic environment. Such an environment fuels the obesity pandemic by limiting healthy options and making options high in fat and calories widely available and affordable. In South LA, 72 percent of restaurants are fast food. While 17.9 percent of people in all of LA County are food insecure (“Map the Meal Gap | Food Insecurity in Your County,” 2014), for low-income adults this number increases to 42 percent. The collision of poverty and obesigenic environments results in food insecure people who are also overweight, and facing diabetes and heart disease. In LA County, 43.4 percent of

people who suffer from obesity are also food insecure, as are 42.1 percent of those who are overweight. These issues are most prevalent in the low-income and minority neighborhoods of South and East LA. In South LA, 35.5 percent of adults are obese and 28.9 percent of children. In this neighborhood, diabetes affects over 11 percent of the adult population. In East LA's Boyle Heights and surrounding areas, 61 percent of residents are obese or overweight and 14 percent have diabetes ("Hungry No More: A Blueprint to End Hunger in Los Angeles," 2009).

The institutionalization of race and power caused the formation of gangs and the construction of a built environment that fosters food insecurity to occur simultaneously. The connection between food insecurity and gang violence based upon race relations is further solidified in the city's response to the 1992 riots. Violence erupted in South Central on April 29 and lasted 3 days resulting in over 50 dead, 2,000 injured, and one billion dollars in property damage. The immediate cause of the riots was the not-guilty verdict of four white Los Angeles police officers who had been caught on tape brutally beating Rodney King, a black man they had just followed in a high speed chase. However, the riots were a response to the deep seeded issues in the area. South Central was highly affected by a crack epidemic in the 1980s, and crime rates reached their peak 1992 with over 1000 murders in the city, primarily due to gang violence ("LA Riots," 2014). The civil unrest drew attention to the issues in South LA, and instigated a campaign to "Rebuild LA" (RLA) and invest in underserved communities. The primary strategy of investment was to build new supermarkets in LA's poorest communities. Residents cited supermarkets as essential to the revitalization of South LA, and major grocery store chains promised to build 32 new inner city markets. Despite the promising

outlooks for community building and food security that Rebuild LA brought, only 16 stores opened by the time RLA disbanded in 1997 and the grocery gap continues to persist today (Shaffer, 2002; Bassford et al., 2010). The initial response strategy to the riots through investing in supermarkets highlights the fact that improving food security can also improve community outlooks as whole.

Whether or not the connection between food insecurity and gang violence is more than just a narrative is ultimately a moot point. The reality is that both issues occur in the same neighborhoods, and as such, there is no reason that solutions cannot address both. The potential of community-based solutions to create community cohesion means they also have the potential to reduce violence. Similarly, if poverty is a cause of both food insecurity and gang violence then power of community food projects to create new economic spaces through community-driven economies could help to address both problems.

Bridging the gap between policy and community

The demonstrated coexistence of food insecurity, gang violence, and food related health problems such as obesity and diabetes in Los Angeles's poorest neighborhoods reflects a need to find solutions to food insecurity that also provide tools to promote community cohesion. As I outlined in previous chapters, national government policy solutions address food security and health outcomes, but community-based solutions address these issues as well as promoting community cohesion and creating new economic spaces. My research in Los Angeles demonstrates that community-based solutions need to be backed by government policy, and governmental solutions need to be backed by the community. In order for non-policy solutions to food insecurity to work

they must be backed legally. Julie Beals, executive director of the LA Community Garden Council explained the challenge of uniting policy and non-policy solutions “The biggest challenge is the people in city hall don’t really understand South LA. People don’t want to go there because it has a reputation of being so violent. Most of the legislators are focusing on areas that make more noise, and people who are undocumented don’t have a voice.” For example, having a community garden is only successful as long as it is able to stay on the land it occupies without legal backlash. This section explores how the national policies are experienced in Los Angeles, what local policies are in place, and finally, what community solutions to food insecurity exist in the city. The experience of each of these solutions is critical to understanding how they are affecting the community. Much of this research is based upon interviews with community organizers in Los Angeles.

National safety nets for food insecurity and hunger are a necessary part of combating these issues in Los Angeles. However, multiple factors are inhibiting the success of such programs. Lack of knowledge about the programs, and therefore limited participation, is a major factor limiting the ability for food assistance programs to work. Only just over half the people eligible for CalFresh, California’s SNAP program, in Los Angeles receive benefits (Shimanda, 2012). Homelessness and limited English language skills are barriers to CalFresh participation. Signing up for CalFresh requires an address, making it impossible for homeless individuals to participate (Algert, Reibel, and Renvall, 2006). In Los Angeles, 62 percent of low-income students participate in the School Lunch Program, and 26 percent participate in the School Breakfast Program. Lack of knowledge and education about nutrition assistance programs, limited participation, and

lack of access to food stores all contribute to the failure of national policies to adequately address food insecurity in Los Angeles. Additionally, the large population of undocumented people in South and East LA are unable benefit from government programs, and therefore must rely on other forms of achieving food security.

Specific policies have been implemented in South Los Angeles to address the built environment's contribution to food insecurity and obesity. Beginning in 2006, market incentives for food retailers offer financing, energy discounts, and technical and planning assistance to large grocery stores, sit down restaurants, and produce markets opening in South LA ("Market Opportunities: Incentives for Food Retailers," 2006). This is a necessary incentive both because South LA needs access to more grocery stores and because money is leaving the community as people leave to buy food. Hector Gutierrez, of the Community Health Council, stated that "dollars are leaking out of the community because the community is going somewhere else" (Interview, March 25, 2014). People from South LA often travel to nearby Culver City to go to Trader Joes. In 2008, Los Angeles introduced radical legislation that banned the opening of new fast food chains in South LA for at least two years ("L.A. OKs Moratorium on Fast-Food Restaurants," 2014). The ban is still in effect, but may be overhauled in the near future (Paulas, 2013). In 2010 a Surplus Food Policy was implemented requiring city departments that provide food to donate excess to local food banks, pantries, or organizations accepting food donations ("LA Food Policies," 2014). In August of 2013, LA City Council passed an ordinance allowing the gardening of public parkways, making urban gardening immediately legal for people throughout the city, even if they have little access to land ("Los Angeles Finally Allows Parkway Farming," 2014). Finally, the Urban Agriculture

Incentives Zones Act, AB 551, provides property tax reductions for private landowners who contract their land for agricultural use for at least 10 years. The fight for food policies that support the community and promote food security is ongoing. Policy advocates are currently looking at the possibility of mandating the acceptance of EBT at farmers' markets on Los Angeles City land, as well as the possibility of allowing pop-up markets to accept EBT (Gutierrez, Interview, March 25, 2014).

For people who aren't caught by the food safety net, farmers markets and community gardens, as well as other community solutions such as corner-store transformations and market match programs are critical avenues for fresh food supply, creating new economic spaces, and improving community cohesion. As Los Angeles guerilla gardener Ron Finley often says, "Planting your own food is like growing your own money" (Finley, 2013).

Los Angeles has limited public transportation and walkable accessibility. These characteristics make access to fresh produce particularly difficult in low-income neighborhoods without supermarkets where families often have only one car for a large family or no vehicle at all. Farmers' markets in these areas have outstanding benefits to improving access, health, and overall food security. The presence of the East Los Angeles Farmers' Market and the Watts Healthy Farmers' Market has resulted in community members eating more fruits and vegetables, eating less packaged and fast food, eating more foods that are culturally traditional, spending less money on food, being more physically active, and being better able to provide for families (Ruelas et al., 2011). The two markets are located in low-income neighborhoods of Los Angeles. The populations are predominately Latino and African American and have excessively high rates of food

insecurity, obesity, and diabetes. East LA is a predominantly Latino neighborhood, so it is not surprising that market 93 percent of the consumers are Latino. Watts is a historically African American neighborhood that has only recently seen an influx of Latino residents. However, at the Watts market in South LA, where African Americans make up 40 percent of the neighborhood, Latino consumers still make up 78 percent of the market. Ruelas and her colleagues note “that Latinos, especially those born outside the US or with close ties to family in Mexico or Central America, are far more likely to be culturally familiar with fresh-air and specialty produce markets than African Americans, many having been raised in food environments with few outlets to fresh produce” (Ruelas et al., 2011). The geography of the food landscape in Los Angeles has slowly changed the culture, practice, and knowledge about food. The community creates a knowledge base and cultural tradition around food that directly affects the way individuals and families experience food security.

While changing access is not going to immediately change the food security situation within a community, it is the first step from a top-down model towards improving health. In order for the situation to fully change, the community must be educated about reclaiming their own health through food and also provide their own solutions. Frank Tamborello, the founder and executive director of Hunger Action LA, recognizes the need for community based initiatives in the promotion of strong communities, “in order to have a really strong society you have to have a lot of people that are able to act out their own initiatives for addressing the problems facing their community” (Tamborello, Interview, March 6, 2014). However, he also notes that “policy reaches the largest number of people” most immediately to address issues of

hunger and food insecurity. Tamborello's organization steps up where policy falls short. Through their Market Match LA program, they provide up to 10 dollars a week in bonus vouchers for people on SNAP, WIC, Social Security, or SSI to spend at 12 farmers' markets around the city. The program is primarily privately funded through donations and fundraisers. Unlike the national government programs, which ameliorate food insecurity through the support large agribusiness, the Market Match program is directly assisting the community by achieving four goals: "healthy eating, ending hunger, promoting environmentally sustainable farming, and helping the local economy" (Tamborello, Interview, March 6, 2014). Anisha Hingorani, from the LA Food Policy Council, expressed the success of the program, "The Market Match program is, I think, a great way to get more low-income and food insecure populations into what is primarily seen as not accessible food retail markets" (Interview, March 25, 2014). The ability of non-policy solutions to address multiple challenges facing communities at one time reiterates their value in promoting community well being. Large government programs are trying to address issues for millions of people in many diverse community all at once, limiting their ability to provide a holistic approach to solving problems. In contrast, non-policy solutions inherently bring members of a community together and can address a multitude of issues at once.

Community gardens are one of the most effective ways to bring people together and change the geography of the food landscape. Los Angeles leads the United States in vacant lots, owning 26 square miles of unused land (Finley, 2014). Los Angeles County is home to 118 community gardens ("Cultivate L.A. An Assessment of Urban Agriculture in Los Angeles County," 2013), 70 of which are run by the LA Community Garden

Council. Community gardens have very different outcomes depending upon the neighborhood in which they are placed. In an affluent area such as Pasadena, the community garden works in the community as a fun recreational activity that also teaches the next generation and brings families together outside. Gardening is a pastime that brings families and neighbors together. Tamborello stated, “If you can get people together to plant a garden, you can get them together to address some of the other issues in the neighborhood” Interview, March 6, 2014). In Watts, an area with a high concentration of poverty, the community garden provides food and work. Of the 200 gardeners at the 11-block Watts community garden, only one speaks English. Watts is a neighborhood with a high concentration of undocumented immigrants, many of whom were farmers in their home country. Without documentation to acquire a job, the garden acts as a source of income when members produce more produce than can feed their families. This situation has led to the occurrence of pop-up markets where gardeners sell excess produce out of the back of their cars. Such markets are completely outside traditional economic avenues, and are creating community-initiated and sustained economies. Gardens in areas like Watts are also locations where former gang members can work and receive mentorship for older community members (Beals, Interview, March 3, 2014). As South Central guerilla gardener Ron Finley (2013) says, the culture needs to change to encourage young people to “get gangster with your shovel”(Finley, 2013).

The ability of community gardens to reduce crime provides a valuable incentive when garnering legal support. Because gardens are built on land that is owned by state or private investors, there is constant possibility of shutdown (Allen, 1999). AB 551, the policy that provides tax deductions for community garden land is a step in the right

direction for supporting community gardening efforts. The LA Community Garden Council is working with the city's government to get cheap extended leases on unused land to minimize the potentially ephemeral nature of community gardens.

The emergence of pop-up markets in South and East Los Angeles, out of urban gardens, creates a successful avenue for food distribution, but also encounters legal policy barriers. Since October, pop-up markets have distributed 6.5 tons of produce (Gutierrez, Interview, March 25, 2014). Beals highlighted the importance of legalizing these markets because they are happening already and not being enforced. She noted the problem of getting city council members to understand the necessity of their legalization because such markets would be unwelcome in wealthier neighborhoods. Because most of the people working these markets are undocumented and may have a language barrier that inhibits their ability to advocate for themselves to legislators, organizations advocate for them. Beals stated, "People who are undocumented don't have a voice. And we are trying to be a voice for them"(Beals, Interview, March 3, 2014)

While pop-up markets are creating new economic spaces for food retail, corner store conversions are reimagining existing food retail outlets. Based on the fact that 76 percent of existing food retail outlets in South LA are convenience stores (Bassford, Galloway-Gilliam, and Flynn, 2010), shifting the products sold at them radically changes the food landscape. The LA Food Policy Council provides technical assistance to storeowners who want to start carrying healthy product and aids them in making it financially viable to change the mix of healthy and unhealthy foods in the market to favor healthy foods. Hingorani, who is working on conversions in LA, highlighted the challenges of low profit margins of such a shift and said, "Frankly, right now, its cheaper

to purchase and stock junk foods” (Interview, March 25, 2014). She also noted that as more stores make the conversion, the model becomes easier to replicate because stores purchase from the same distributors. One of the most valuable successes of corner store conversions is that the community is engaged in the process through outreach, educational programming, and workshops. These elements are fundamental in the success of the corner store, and simultaneously create a space to foster social capital and therefore promote community cohesion. Recent research shows that simply introducing grocery stores does not automatically lead to better health (Cummins, Flint, and Matthews, 2014). The engagement and garnering of community support for healthy food options is particularly important for successfully impacting food security and health.

Learning from Los Angeles

Los Angeles is a global city that can be seen as model for systems change in California and across the country (Gutierrez, Interview, March 25, 2014). The success of farmers’ markets, community gardens, pop-up markets, and corner store conversions in promoting health and food security can be used as models for systems change in other cities. The work of community advocates in the government to help pass public policy that supports these programs and solutions to food insecurity provides an archetype for the necessity for collaboration between community partners and government. The success of community-based solutions is that they can provide outreach and education in the community to garner support for solutions in ways that policy solutions cannot. Using collaborative efforts, food security, health, new economies, and strong communities can be created and sustained in a movement toward food security justice.

Conclusion

I coin the term “food security justice” to mean a movement towards focusing solutions to food insecurity in the injustices that create the problem. This term departs from the food justice movement’s critique of the alternative food movement to a critique of solutions to food security as they address issues of justice. It necessitates a shift in community food projects from simply alternative projects that are often inaccessible to low-income minorities to projects that are inherently accessible to marginalized groups. Access is the key component of justice in food security, and community food projects cannot be considered part of a food security justice movement unless they address individuals and communities that are food insecure. Food security justice also broadens definitions of justice in the food system to include the government, as important solutions to food insecurity come from national policies. It calls for policy solutions to food insecurity to address injustices also.

The way the food system currently functions and solutions to food insecurity function within it, community-based solutions to food insecurity offer the most tangible efforts to confront injustice and provide food for the people who need it most. They have the ability to be located in the communities that need food the most, and to be run and supported by community members, allowing individuals to have control over their own food systems and health. The Los Angeles food system provides evidence of the necessity for cooperation between policy and non-policy efforts, as they each can support each other to attain a common goal. While necessary, the national food safety net is limited in its ability to address access as the major injustice of the food system. National

policies provide financial capital but are not able to change the food landscape of the people receiving benefits. As such, financial assistance provided is limited to use based on the beneficiary's access to food systems. Unfortunately, access to healthy food systems is largely dependent upon the industrial food system. Farmers' markets provide an excellent example of the ability of non-industrial food systems to utilize national food assistance and improve fresh food access. They epitomize the importance and success of bridging the gap between government policy and community-based solutions to challenge injustice.

Through my participatory research simulating living on SNAP, I discovered that the financial capital provided by the program is useful in providing funds for a healthy diet, but only when other injustices have already been addressed. My success in eating healthily on the budget was due to my access to healthy food retailers, farmer's markets that accepted SNAP, my knowledge of food and nutrition, my location in Southern California, and the time I had available to spend shopping and cooking. My simulation provided evidence for the fact that national government food security programs are necessary, but limited in their ability to confront injustices that contribute to food insecurity.

While in this thesis I could not cover every single program the United State's government funds to promote food security, my simulation of SNAP and exploration of WIC provided evidence the national government policy is limited in its ability to address issues of justice. Additionally, the history of solutions to food insecurity and hunger in the United States provided evidence of the government's refusal to fully acknowledge and take responsibility for these problems. I found that community-based solutions to

food security have the potential to address issues of justice, and also have added benefits of promoting community cohesion and creating new economic spaces in both food secure and food insecure areas.

Through the case study of Los Angeles, I demonstrated the need for mutual support between community food projects and government policy in creating successful solutions to food insecurity. The narrative connecting food insecurity and gang violence provides insight into how the promotion of community cohesion and creation of new economic space, that community-based solutions to food insecurity have the potential to cultivate, can be important parts of addressing food insecurity in communities that are also facing other issues. The connection between food insecurity and gang violence as well as the connection between solutions to food insecurity and the reduction of gang violence is something that needs to be explored beyond the narrative. Quantifying this narrative with continued research could help to improve understandings of the social ramifications of food insecurity.

Ultimately, the determinants of food security are a justice issue. A justice issue that is a result of the industrial food system, as well as larger problems of neoliberalism, institutionalized racism, and structures of oppression. Community food projects alone are not going to change these structures and institutions of domination. They can act as points of resistance, points to begin making broader change. Taking control of your own food and food system is a radical act. It makes the most basic human necessity available outside of a traditional capitalist framework. It creates new economies, stronger communities, and better health. It is empowering. As Graham Riches (1997) writes, “If hunger and undernutrition are a function of people’s lack of control over the food

production and distribution system, then it is essential that empowerment strategies are developed in order to reassert ownership” (p. 175). Community food projects have the incredible potential to allow people to reassert ownership.

Food security justice is attained when this potential is unlocked. When community food projects are actually helping the people who need food the most. When local and national policy supports community food projects and helps to change the food landscape. When changing the food system is not only about an alternative to the industrial food system for the wealthy, but more importantly about access to sustainable, local, organic foods for people who are food insecure. When it does not take 65 years (from the International Declaration to Human Rights establishment in 1948 to 2013) for the United States to recognize the right to food as a basic human right. When instead, the fact that 14 percent of the country is food insecure is an outrage for national policy makers. Food security justice is about addressing the root causes of food insecurity in every solution.

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