

Food Security in Urban New Zealand: Food Waste, Food Utopias, and Food Values

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Abstract:

Despite having an overall high standard of living, from 2015-2016 only 60.8% of households with children in New Zealand reported being fully food secure (NZ Ministry of Health 2019). Even more frustrating is that supermarkets and restaurants in North America, Europe, Australia and New Zealand are constantly stocked with 150-200% of surplus food over what it would take to nutritionally feed their populations, with much of it going to waste. To explore this, I conducted a nine-week ethnographic case study of Kaibosh Food Rescue which is a non-profit food aid initiative operating in Wellington, New Zealand, that collects 'food waste' from supermarkets and redistributes it to charities that are offering social services. By following the food through its social life and interviewing an array of stakeholders from organizational staff to individual recipients, I found that rescued 'food waste' continues to embody multiple values even in its supposed afterlife once it is declared as 'waste' by supermarkets. In this thesis I argue that not only does this food waste still hold much nutritional value to help individual recipients feed themselves and their families, it also created social spaces and enriched social lives of the urban food insecure, helped empower parents through learning cooking skills, and facilitated action for recipients to join social services and programming, all of which enhanced well-being and were facilitated by the presence of food. Thus, Kaibosh is experimenting with food waste for food security by combining nutritional and social benefits of food- what Stock et al. (2015) consider a "food utopia"- and ultimately changing the way we think about food and 'food waste', demonstrating what a food utopia can actually do.

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Acronyms:

FAO: Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations

NGOS: Non-governmental organizations

UNHD: United Nations Human Development Index

OECD: Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development

AFNS: Alternative food networks

CBD: Central business district

WCC: Wellington City Council

BGI: Boys & Girls Institute

WCM: Wellington City Mission

DCM: Downtown Community Ministry

Chapter 1: Introduction and Thesis Outline

1.1 Introduction

As anthropologists Mintz and Du Bois (2002, 102) note, “next to breathing, eating is perhaps the most essential of all human activities, and one with which much of social life is entwined.” Obtaining adequate food has always been a fundamental concern for all societies, but in the last century, policy makers globally have taken concerted interest in attempting to eradicate hunger (Shaw 2007). In the spring of 1943, during World War II, the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) was established during a United Nations conference with the president of the United States and was founded on the idea of “freedom from want” of food (Shaw 2007, 3-4). From this time forward as population rates began to rise, there was a push to raise global standards of living through higher employment and food production rates to focus on food security.

Today, the question of food security has become a central concern for international organizations, national governments (Shaw 2007, 15), non-governmental organizations (NGOS), and local communities. Food banks (focused on food *access* and *distribution*) have become a common response in providing food to those who are experiencing food insecurity (see Brinkley et al. 2017 on USA; Davis and Geiger 2017 on Europe; Martorell 2017 on Canada). Typically, these initiatives are at least in part funded by the government and supplemented with personal donations, often from community members living in the area who donate either surplus or newly purchased food. Those in need of food parcels either pick up their allotted amount (as decided upon by the food bank) from the food bank or the food parcel is delivered directly to them.

Scholarly inquiry on food security has most often, in the past, focused on low-income countries, but in recent years, food insecurity rates have begun to rise in countries with high-

income and high standards of living. These countries are now becoming the focus of scholarly research (Davis and Geiger 2017, 343). For example, New Zealand is one of such countries with high standards of living and in 2018 it ranked 14 out of 189 countries on the *United Nations Human Development Index* (UNHD). The UNHD measures the dimensions of having a long and healthy life, being knowledgeable, and having a decent standard of living (UN Human Development Reports 2019). However, from 2015-2016 only 60.8% of households with children in New Zealand reported being fully food secure (NZ Ministry of Health 2019, 6). In light of these statistics, communities are beginning to address these issues through alternative avenues apart from food *production*. There are now social scientists advocating for a wider understanding of social well-being that includes social relationships, emotional well-being, community connectedness, and educational attainments *in addition* to physical health (Boreham et al. 2013, 152). When contemplating a healthy life, access to healthy food is key, however, research shows that in addition to this, social interaction is highly valued towards one's well-being, especially in developed nations where national income levels are found to be higher than that of the developing world (Costanza et al. 2016).

In contemplating how we might think about *alternative* foodways, Stock et al. (2015, 126-27) put it this way: "how we think about things like food is predicated heavily on practices, socio-institutional arrangements, and cultural conventions. [...] because the same processes that underlie our understanding of food underlie our understanding of "possible" (and "impossible") food futures." Though it has limits, a focus on the *production* of food is a popular approach to food systems because it has proven beneficial and has been practiced for an extended period, particularly since World War II. Therefore, initiatives that are considered "new" or "unorthodox" are alternative because of their different way of doing things. Thus, shifting focus to alternative

ways of *distribution* (such as food rescue) may fill in the gaps that are currently seen with productivist logic. Stock et al. go on to explain that moving outside of conventional practice can be considered experimentation, changing our ideas of what we consider to be possible. Not only offering an alternative, Stock et al. (2015, 4) argue that “food utopias” allow us to imagine *what else* we could integrate into our food systems; what is currently missing that could be improved? The concept of food utopias also allows us to re-think, re-imagine and experiment with foodways, rather than focusing on one model alone. In addition, this concept encourages an experimental approach and opens a space for thinking about how we might address food (in)security differently. With such food ‘utopia’ initiatives, local level organizations may exhibit creativity in thinking about how to create different food systems.

There are a number of emerging new initiatives, including community gardens, urban agriculture, and ‘food rescue’, which exemplify such re-creation and experimentation with ways to address food insecurity (Lee and Diprose 2017). Food rescue is the collection and redistribution of not only surplus food but mainly food that is considered ‘food waste’ as determined by retail stores through assessment of monetary exchange value and usability. This includes foods that are close to their expiration dates or have minor aesthetic imperfections. Food rescue is therefore focused on what is possible at the distribution level with an emphasis on re-thinking what we consider food ‘waste’. There is indication that these types of initiatives that have not been widely practised in the past as a way towards food security could be changing the way people think about foodways and food insecurity initiatives which I will demonstrate throughout the thesis. These indications raise questions such as: How else might alternative food programs be changing our ideas around urban food (in)security?; How well do these initiatives

work in terms of positively impacting those who are food insecure?; and What exactly are these alternative food security initiatives creating, material and otherwise, for individuals?

My study intended to understand better the role such food utopias play in addressing the issue of food insecurity in urban areas in countries with high standards of living through an exploratory ethnographic study of the Kaibosh Food Rescue initiative in Wellington, New Zealand. The initial objectives of my study were to understand: how food rescue at Kaibosh operates; what type of charities they support through food rescue; and finally, perspectives from individual food recipients to learn their perceptions of this initiative and the impact it has on their lives. While I did learn a great deal about these practical aspects, I also learned that this utopic food aid initiative is not only opening up new ways of dealing with food insecurity in urban settings, but also creating new ways of thinking about the value of ‘food waste’. I ultimately found that for the food insecure, this rescued food has multiple values that surpass nutrition. As my study progressed, I became aware of these multiple values of (rescued) food as I visited Kaibosh recipient charities where I learned not only how they were using Kaibosh food but consequently what the food was creating and facilitating in these spaces.

While countless studies of food security at the national and household level have been conducted, few have taken an ethnographic approach designed to understand the perspectives of both organizations and individuals involved in alternative food-provisioning initiatives. To address this gap, I chose a “follow-the-thing” approach (Appadurai 1987; Marcus 1995) which allowed me to understand each step (and meaning) of the food waste process for all involved- program coordinators and recipients alike. Through my case-study on Kaibosh, I followed the journey of food from supermarket commodity, to decommodification and ‘food waste’ status, to new value(s) for this food, to consumption by the food insecure.

My research offers insight into the larger topic of scholarly debate in urban food insecurity and action surrounding local level involvement by helping to address how alternative food initiatives at the local level are engaging in food security practices and the impacts of these initiatives on recipients. In addition, my research highlights new ways of thinking about ‘food waste’ in terms of addressing food insecurity as well as focuses on the multiple and changing values of food not only to the food insecure but to all people. It is my hope that by demonstrating a better understanding of the experiences of both initiative organizers and food recipients at Kaibosh, that further research could learn what successful local programs for food security look like, how they may be implemented elsewhere, and ultimately offer encouragement to experiment with new practices for food security endeavors.

1.2 Thesis Outline

Throughout the thesis, I explain in detail how Kaibosh works, which types of charities they support, and offer a small sample of accounts from individual recipients on how ‘waste’ food impacts their lives. I show that the value of food is subjective and always changing as well as how it can have multiple meanings to different people at the same time. I go beyond the material value of food to discuss what food is able to create and facilitate apart from nutrition. I show how Kaibosh is attempting to tackle urban food insecurity through pairing food rescue with charities that provide social services to recipients. The main focus of the thesis is the multiple and changing values of ‘food waste’ for the urban food insecure, and how this initiative may be seen as a utopic food experiment.

To begin, chapter two provides an overview and brief history of food insecurity, its measurements, and attempted solutions in both the developed and developing world. The condition of food insecurity in New Zealand is highlighted as it is the focus of my study. I describe a weaving of conceptual frameworks in which I start with an approach on food utopias, allowing one the space to think differently about what is possible within our food systems in terms of providing alternative solutions and incorporating multiple benefits of food security, food waste, and sociability. Food aid interventions at the national and local level are discussed, with an emphasis on the workings of food banks, as well as what differences characterize urban and rural populations regarding their ability to cope with food insecurity through resources available to them. I detail alternative actions in confronting food waste such as what food waste redistribution (i.e. ‘food rescue’) and the ‘ugly food movement’ entail while providing statistics to contribute to the background and reasoning for these initiatives.

Chapter three outlines my methodology and research design in which I undertook a nine-week exploratory ethnographic study in Wellington, New Zealand. The ethnographic approach is outlined, as well as what I gained from each method used, how I chose my interlocutors, and how I analysed my data. Here, I also outline my methodological approach to “follow the thing” and examine commodity position and value as Appadurai (1986) explains in *The Social Life of Things* in which changing values and multiple meanings are discovered through the study of complex biographies of these commodities (and non-commodities). The limitations of my study are also briefly discussed.

Chapter four outlines the historical development of Kaibosh, as well as details of how food rescue is carried out at Kaibosh, and how Kaibosh works as an organization in present day. I follow the rescued food from the supermarket, to Kaibosh headquarters, to Kaibosh’s recipient

charities, and finally to individual recipients, all while explaining how each of these actors use the food. The material value of rescued food is highlighted with a focus on the impact this rescued food has on the lives of those who receive it.

Chapter five continues to follow the food as it interacts with individual recipients. However, this chapter does not focus on the materiality of food, rather, the focus is on what *else* this food has the potential to create and facilitate. I show how this food waste not only has the nutritional value to feed bodies but also has provided space for: social interaction and inclusion; empowerment; and skill building and education. To ground this, I highlight alternative forms of measuring well-being which offers context in contemplating the impacts alternative food aid initiatives have on individual food recipients.

Chapter six provides summary and conclusions. Here, I discuss the ways in which the Kaibosh initiative is a “food utopia” and illustrate how this “food utopia” has provided space to think about new, different, and changing values of food waste. I highlight how this food rescue experiment capacitated many New Zealanders to think differently about food waste, including the possibilities food waste has beyond its nutritional value for the urban food insecure in working towards food security. Finally, suggestions for further research are offered and remaining questions posed.

Chapter 2: Literature review

2.1 A Brief History of Food (In)security

Conceptualizing Food Security Through Policy: Definitions, Levels, Dimensions, and Measurements

In contemplating food security, the widely accepted definition comes from the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO 2008): “Food security exists when all people, at all times, have physical and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food that meets their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life.” To better understand the scope of food security, there are different levels to consider. The global level of food security looks at availability of food in terms of production. According to Rae and Pardey (2014, 499), global food security is concerned with producing enough food to feed the world’s population. National food security is also concerned with production levels, in addition to the availability of food through aggregate supplies (Warr 2014, 521-22). Aggregate supplies refer to national outputs of food combined with household income available for food, in relation to food prices. This blends into the third level of food security which is that of the household. This level focuses on access to enough food within the household which essentially translates to having the means to produce food or the monetary means to purchase food for the household. The individual level of food security concentrates on the distribution of food within the household. This means if a household is experiencing food insecurity, it may affect some household members differently than others.

Duration and severity of food insecurity, vulnerability, and hunger, malnutrition and poverty are concepts that the FAO (2008, 1-4) uses to understand food security. Duration of food

insecurity is thought of either in terms of chronic (long-term/persistent) or transitory (short-term/temporary). Seasonal food insecurity flows between each of these measures as it has limited duration but is reoccurring. Severity of food insecurity is measured by “the proportion of the population whose dietary energy consumption is less than the pre-determined threshold” and is measured through caloric intake. Vulnerability is assessed through three layers that inform each other which include: vulnerability of outcome; a variety of risk factors; and an inability to manage those risks. The last concepts look at hunger, malnutrition and poverty. Hunger is described as food energy deprivation resulting in uncomfortable or painful bodily sensation(s). Malnutrition is an imbalance of nutrient consumption and includes factors beyond food such as insufficient medical attention and unhealthy environments. Poverty encompasses different dimensions of deprivation which does include food security as well as health and education among other aspects.

With these concepts in mind, to be considered food secure each of the following four dimensions must be satisfied according to the FAO (2008, 1): availability; access; utilization; and stability. Each of these conditions factor into the degree of food insecurity felt at a given level (global, national, household or individual). These four dimensions build on each other, providing a holistic framework in conceptualizing food security. The first dimension, availability, refers to the physical availability of food through food production rates and is influenced by stock levels and net trade. Access is concerned with economic and physical access to food and highlights that even if there is ‘enough’ food produced, it does not guarantee households will have the monetary means or feasible transportation to access this food. Economic access means having sufficient funds to purchase food, while physical access means being able to get to the food which can be made difficult or impossible due to (for example): lack

of transportation, ongoing warfare, or natural disasters such as floods or wildfires. The dimension of utilization looks at the nutritional status of individuals. Factors that play into this are feeding practices, food preparation, diversity of food, and household distribution of food. The last dimension, stability, refers to the stability of the other three dimensions over time. In other words, how reliable is the availability, access and utilization of the food you have today?

Finally, it should be noted that food insecurity has no uniform way of manifesting itself. Not only does it cause hunger and malnutrition, Carter et al. (2011, 1463) also argue that it can result in psychological distress and trigger or worsen mental illness. Another example of adverse outcomes associated with food insecurity is described by Wentworth (2016) who studied *lafets* (community feasts) in Port Vila, Vanuatu. Her research showed that children from the community would uninvitedly regularly take part in *lafets* because they were not getting enough food at home. This open display of ‘neediness’ created a degradation of social status for their parents, as it made a private matter very public.

Factors and Emerging Approaches to Food Security

There are multiple approaches to ensuring food security which are context specific (see, e.g. Burchi and de Muro 2016, 11). In the mid-20th century inadequate food supplies were seen to be the biggest factor leading to food insecurity. To address this issue, international organizations focused on national and global food supplies as the global population rate rose. Based on Thomas Malthus’ view of population growth and supplies, until the 1970s, food security was focused on the global and national scale, accounting for the strong focal point on productivity (Maxwell and Smith 1992, 4). The aim was to increase production through *Green Revolution* and intensive production with chemical fertilizers, irrigation and improved seed varieties, essentially working towards a per-capita food availability rate to feed the earth’s

growing population (Burchi and De Muro 2016, 11). In more recent years, smart technology has been adapted to agriculture to increase productivity through agricultural equipment and computer automation among other technology-driven initiatives (Wolfert 2017).

However, a sole focus on productivity has a blind spot in that it fails to address the distribution of food that is being produced. Attwood (2005, 2071-72) describes the issue of food distribution in Western India, where remote areas regularly experienced famine caused by drought and lack of food transportation. An example Attwood highlights is from Bombay Deccan, a plateau region in the state of Maharashtra. For centuries this rural region experienced extreme famine as it was at the mercy of rainfall patterns, with no transportation system in place to import food from the outside. Famine persisted in remote areas until 1860 when construction of the railroad began. With the new railroad, famine rates drastically declined as surplus food began to be distributed to (more remote) villages in need. This connectivity was also responsible for narrowing the gap of food prices among different villages, making food more accessible, physically and economically. While adequate transportation can significantly help with problems of the distribution of food, as Attwood points out, when drought became a problem for most of India, national transportation of food was unhelpful in preventing famine because there was not enough food in any village, let alone enough to redistribute elsewhere. As a result, food prices went up, and people were unable to afford food. Administrative initiatives attempted to create jobs (such as building roadways, canals, railways etc.) to increase income for workers so food would be more economically accessible. As the FAO definition indicates, physical and economic access to food are important, but so too is the nutritional quality of that food. As such, Grey and Patel (2015) and Power (2008) each studied food insecurity among indigenous populations in Canada and found that limited access to traditional foods and other healthy foods was a cause for

many health complications because reserves often have but one convenience store with low-nutrition, high-sugar, high-calorie foods.

As the conceptualization of food security became more focused on the access of food at the household and individual level in the 1980s, Amartya Sen (1981) argued that availability of food does not guarantee access to food. To understand how households became food (in)secure, Sen looks at people's entitlements, that is: "people's ability to command food through legal means available in the society" (Sen 1981, 433). In other words, this means individuals should be able to access what is 'rightfully' available to them. For example, in terms of food security, the entitlements approach sees individuals and families as having various means to provide food for themselves through accessing resources in which they have 'rights' to, which could include using their land to plant a garden to obtain food or using their social networks to gain access to food from individuals or organizations. Problems arise when people are prevented from using resources to which they have rights, such as children not being able to get the education needed for jobs or family farmland being taken away.

Finally, there are a number of other factors that directly affect specific households and/or individuals. For example, Fabinyi et al. (2017) argue that disruptions such as illness or climate and weather patterns may hinder a person's ability to partake in fishing activities, which for many is a family's only means of generating income for food. Others, such as Carter et al. (2010) have noted that single parent households are more likely to experience food insecurity and be more dependent on government subsidies, resulting in poor health outcomes. These health outcomes may include iron deficiency and anemia, obesity (due to lack of nutritious food which is more expensive than high-calorie, high-sugar, low-nutrition foods), and poor physical and mental health (Carter et al. 2010, 602; see also: Utter 2018, 35).

In other cases, research has shown that how resources are allocated within households can greatly affect food security of some or all. For example, in her research on food security in Port Vila, Vanuatu, Wentworth (2016) found the cause to be that household monetary funds were often distributed elsewhere first, such as towards school uniforms for the children to attend school, rather than being spent on nutritional food. In addition to poor health outcomes, another finding through much of the literature on food security shows an unequal divide between male and female experience is reported, with females often bearing most of the burden in comparison to males (Agarwal 2014; Carter et al. 2010; Grey et al. 2015; Preibisch et al. 2002; Wentworth 2016). This burden translates to young boys often being fed before young girls in the household, and women forgoing eating altogether so that men and children can eat.

Research shows an imbalance in food system responsibilities between men and women and has also shown women to be the main food producers in agricultural intensive regions (see Agarwal 2014; Preibisch et al. 2002). For example, Preibisch et al. (2002, 73) found that in rural Mexico, the women most often had the responsibility of making sure food was available for the family, while at the same time the men had most access and control over monetary assets. The gendered experience of food insecurity can manifest as stress due to responsibility as Preibisch et al. (2002) and Carter et al. (2011) describe, or as the physical experience of hunger, as Carter et al. (2010) found with their study of New Zealand in which they surveyed 19,000 persons ages 15 or older. They reported similar studies and findings from Canada and the United States as well. For example, according to Carter et al. (2010, 603-06) in their study of New Zealand, women were more likely than men to report being unable to eat properly or report running out of food more often due to lack of money. In addition, families headed by a female also reported higher levels of food insecurity compared to those headed by a male in which “over 44% of female sole

parents were food insecure compared to 19% of male sole parents” (Carter et al. 2010, 604).

Carter et al. do offer some speculation as to why this is; they explain that females typically have different “social roles” than men which include taking care of children and feeding the family and are then more apt to go without eating when food is low in order to feed men and children first. They also found more females than males in lower income groups which could possibly be explained by the gender wage gap which was 10.8% in New Zealand in favour of men at the time this study was conducted in 2010, and is 9.3% in the most recent report from 2019 (Stats NZ 2019).

While a large portion of the world’s population still relies on agricultural production or foraging and hunting to feed themselves, their families, and their communities, as Attwood (2005) points out, the ability to purchase food is increasingly important to ensuring food security especially during times of crisis. For those who do not produce their own food such as in industrialized countries where most people must purchase their food through an agro-industrial food system, income is key to food security. Thus, economists such as Reutlinger (1977) saw the problem of malnutrition and food insecurity as that of a monetary issue. He analyzed the impact of income on food security in which the focus leans towards individuals’ lack of income to purchase enough food. Likewise, in mapping the agri-food policy landscape in Canada for *Food Secure Canada*, Martorell (2017, 2) claims that increasing income by way of income supplements is thought to be the most effective way to increase food security within Canada.

Although much of the literature on food insecurity focuses on rural peoples in developing countries, more recent research on industrialized countries shows that urban food insecurity is a considerable problem (Davis and Geiger 2017, 343). With that said, not much research has been conducted specifically on what differences characterize urban populations and their experiences

from that of rural populations regarding the ways they can and do cope with food insecurity. However, we can surmise that urban populations may deal with specific challenges in accessing food and have different resources available (or not available) to them, and therefore need solutions and initiatives tailored to their specific set of needs. For example, in their case study on urban Nairobi, Kenya, Gallaher et al. (2013, 390-91) explain that urban populations often have less space for gardening and are therefore more dependent on the cash economy to gain access to basic needs such as food and water (see also: Tam et al. 2014, 465). Gallaher et al. (2013, 392) conclude that those who participated in *sack gardening*ⁱ with friends or neighbors increased their social capital, creating social ties and “safety nets” for when they find themselves in times of need. Mohnen et al. (2011, 661) argue that as urban populations share relatively small living areas with their neighbours, they- rather than rural populations- are more dependant on each other and therefore in higher need of productive social capital. Michael Woolcock (2001, 67) explains social capital as the idea “that one's family, friends and associates constitute an important asset, one that can be called upon in a crisis, enjoyed for its own sake and/or leveraged for material gain.” However, research indicates that many urban dwellers do not have as many familial or personal connections in the city to lean on (Mohnen et al. 2011, 661).

Likewise, Tam et al. (2014, 468) also found urban populations to have less access to social network resources than their rural counterparts. In their study on social networks as a coping strategy for food insecurity among indigenous youth and urban Canadian youth, Tam et al. (2014, 467-69) claim that rural populations more often have closer kin ties and stronger “informal” social networks (i.e. social capital), making food sharing more accessible in times of need. As a result, urban residents are more likely to seek “formal” approaches such as foodbanks, which are often physically easier to access for urbanites due in part to shorter distances between

institutions and homes, and easier access to public transportation. However, the authors note that not all food insecure individuals might access these services due to social stigmas and/or difficulties in being approved for food aid, among other reasons. Tam et al. (2014, 470) also highlight that urban households are more likely to decrease their food intake in response to food insecurity, as opposed to rural households whose populations are more likely to call on their (reciprocal) social networks in times of emergency rather than go without food.

As we can see, social capital in urban environments may play out differently than in rural landscapes, and under different circumstances. In their work titled *Social Networks and Social Exclusion*, Phillipson et al. (2016, 39-40) discuss their research conducted on social networks in three urban areas of England. They argue that those in urban neighbourhoods may be more susceptible to social exclusion, and that the severity of social exclusion is positively correlated with increasing levels of poverty and old age (especially for those withdrawn from the labour force). Similarly, Tam et al. (2014, 470) report that “social isolation [is] significantly associated with food insecurity and hunger.” From this, Phillipson et al. (2014, 40) surmise that positive social networks appear to be least accessible for those in society who may need them the most. Not many speculations are made as to why this is, however, the authors do note that those living in urban areas tend to “disregard kin” when compared to their rural counterparts due to the increased opportunities- both “social and institutional”- often found in urban environments (theoretically). However, Phillipson et al. (2016, 164-66) point out that when these social networks are not mobilized, feelings of isolation and loneliness may move in. As we will see in the chapters to come, these increased opportunities for social interaction in urban areas do not always play out as such, especially for those who are most vulnerable. Phillipson et al. also found that exclusion in urban areas could be attributed to “individuals' non-participation in

common social activities, social isolation, a perceived lack of support in times of need, lack of civic engagement and an inability to 'get out and about'", and "zones of transition" where apartment complexes might experience high turnover rates in residents.

2.2 Food Security in Industrialized Countries (countries with overall high standards of living)

North America and Europe

As Davis and Geiger (2017, 343) note, inquiry on food security has most often in the past focused on low-income countries, but in recent years, high-income countries have been increasingly the topic of scholarly research as food insecurity rates have begun to rise. In 2012, the *Household Food Security Survey Model* was conducted throughout all provinces and territories for Statistics Canada's *Canadian Community Health Survey* (Tarasuk et al. 2014, 5-13). The results revealed that 12.6% of households experienced some level of food insecurity at some point throughout the previous year. Data from this survey showed that food insecurity rates have been rising since 2008, and since 2011, an additional 130,000 people are experiencing food insecurity which brings the individual total to over 4 million people nationwide. When asked to describe what food security meant, respondents who reported being food insecure defined it several different ways including: "being worried that their food would run out before they got money to buy more; that the food bought for the household did not last and there was no money to buy more; that they had cut the size of meals, or skipped meals entirely because there wasn't enough money to purchase food" (Tarasuk et al. 2014, 14). In a similar study, Coleman-Jenson et al. (2018, 1) for the *United States Department of Agriculture* found that 11.8% of American households were food insecure in 2017.

In their work on food insecurity in Europe, Davis and Geiger (2017, 344) note that as many European governments do not routinely monitor food related issues, detailed data on national food securities in this region is low. However, their research does show that food bank use has risen in the UK each year since 2010, while France and Germany have been seeing this same trend since 2008 and 2005 respectively. Davis and Geiger claim the German rise in food bank usage is largely attributed to cuts in welfare aid of the same year. In Belgium, food bank use rates have been steadily rising since 2011 and are now double what they were in 1995.

In the Global North, much of the problem has to do with the quality of food available to certain groups of people. In Loo and Skipper's (2017, 8) *Food Insecurity, the Obesity Crisis, and Exploitation in the US Food System*, they note that health disparities such as obesity are linked to food insecurity. Households that report experiencing food insecurity may have food, but the quality of the food is the issue where food security requires enough healthy nutritious food to eat. This lack of healthy foods is one of the contributing factors influencing obesity, thus, food security here not only references not having enough food, it includes the *quality* of the food as well. Food desert regions often have high obesity rates and are an issue in some industrialized nations. Food deserts can be described as a "lack of nearby affordable, healthy food retail" (Brinkely et al. 2017, 328). As Loo and Skipper (2017, 15) state, food deserts have "become ubiquitous within both the inner cores of many metropolises and across much of the rural countryside within the USA, Canada, Australia, and the UK." Brinkely et al. (2017, 329) report 23.5 million people in the United States live in food desert regions.

Food Banks and Government Initiatives

As mentioned above, welfare systems, food banks, and food distribution are commonly implemented in communities in an attempt to curb food insecurity rates in Europe (and other

developed nations) (Davis and Geiger 2017, 344). As Tarasuk and Eakin (2003, 1506) note in their study on food banks in Ontario, food banks in Canada first began as temporary relief for those experiencing food insecurity during the recession in the early 1980s. The authors report that the number of food banks began to rapidly increase while the need for food assistance grew, however, needs were (and continue to be) consistently unmet as “examinations of the assistance provided by food banks confirm the limited quantity and nutritional quality of food available for distribution” (Tarasuk and Eakin 2003, 1506). In their study on food bank use in British Columbia, Holmes et al. (2018, 130) found that “despite popular language that labels food banks as part of the “emergency food system”, North American evidence suggests that food banks are used as a long-term subsistence strategy”, while adding that there is little research on the underlying issues recipients face in turning to food banks for “long-term use.”

Tarasuk and Eakin (2003, 1508) report that charitable food banks are often operated by “church groups or non-governmental, community service agencies.” Most of these food bank organizations are operated out of the founding organization’s facility with “makeshift accommodations”, rather than having their own headquarters. The majority of this type of conventional food bank receives food from both “industry and public donations” (Tarasuk and Eakin 2003, 1508; see also: Holmes et al. 2018) which means food received comes from local supermarkets and/ or personal donations from people living in the area. As food banks are often responsible for the “needy” in their area, potential recipients normally must provide proof of addresses with a valid identification card to verify that they indeed live in the area. Coordinator positions are often paid, although the rest of the day-to-day work tends to be carried out by volunteers. Depending on the organization, the food parcels recipients receive could either be pre-packed, or they are offered a choice between certain food items. Tarasuk and Eakin (2003,

1508-11) also reported that “some food banks also offered other kinds of assistance to clients, such as information about local programs, job training opportunities; referrals to other programs and services; assistance in finding affordable housing; and free, used clothing.” The authors ultimately found that “the distribution of food assistance was largely dissociated from client need”; for example, recipients being given food they cannot eat such as a diabetic receiving food that is not within diabetic diet health standards. However, Holmes et al. (2018, 130) claim there is little critical research on the impact food banks have in addressing food insecurity at the local level.

In food deserts in the United States, a common governmental policy response has often been to encourage the opening of a new supermarket in the area(s), the idea being that if healthy food is easier to physically access, individuals will be more likely to choose these foods (Brinkley et al. 2017, 328). However, there are critiques of this policy response. As noted earlier, physical distance to healthy foods is not the only factor determining food insecurity rates. Research has shown that that socioeconomic status, ethnicity and income are linked to food insecurity, in addition to physical access to supermarkets (Brinkley et al. 2017; see also: Ghosh-Dastidar et al. 2017).

In Canada, broad initiatives under a development called *A Food Policy for Canada* focuses on “four broad themes relating to increasing access to safe and nutritious food; improving health and food safety; conserving our soil, water, and air; and growing more high-quality food” (Government of Canada 2018, 1). This policy development demonstrates its widespread objectives to increase food security through healthy environments. Other initiatives such as the charity model (i.e. food banks) and tax incentives for agri-food operators to encourage providing food banks with produce are common practice (Martorell 2017, 2).

Addressing income through income support strategies is seen as the most effective way to reduce food insecurity. Since 1996, social, health and education programs have been implemented in provinces and territories through federal cost-sharing initiatives to address food security (Martorell 2017, 3). These approaches are in contrast with much of the global south, in which food security initiatives are more often seen at the local community level, and with more emphasis on small-scale producers and production. However, in many areas of the world, regional governments and urban and rural authorities are increasingly joining with local level initiatives to develop food charters and strategies.

Local Organizations for Food Security Initiatives

As food insecurity in ‘developed’ nations has been rising since the 2008 food crisis, many people in these countries are turning to what Davis and Geiger (2017, 344) describe as “community-oriented support systems.” The anthropological literature shows that small scale communities often employ norms of generalized reciprocity and other cultural mechanisms to help alleviate hunger (see Wentworth 2016 on Vanuatu). Examples of locally based initiatives in diverse urban populations becoming more popular with these types of support systems are food banks, soup-kitchens, food stamps, food vouchers, and offsite food distribution to bring food to those in need. In high-income nations such as Canada, Martorell (2017, 2) lists different types of interventions at the local level. The first is a “charity approach” which is the use of food banks, while the second approach is through “social inclusion programs and strategies.” These programs “include food education and skill building activities (e.g., cooking, gardening) as well as collective models of service delivery and social entrepreneurship such as collective kitchens, consumer cooperatives, and farmers markets.”

Urban agriculture, where communities plant gardens in cityscapes to create access to fresh fruits and vegetables, is also increasing in popularity. Duignan (2011, 19) reports that in Wellington, New Zealand, the *Wellington City Council* supports many community gardening groups throughout the city. Research shows that the benefits of these urban community gardens include “improved access to and knowledge of healthy food, increased physical activity levels, promote motivation to learn, improve self-esteem and social skills, and teach interpersonal skills.” One problem is that some communities wishing to start urban agriculture projects have trouble identifying proper land on which to do so. In Toronto, Wekerle (2004, 382) found that urban agriculture projects helped to “address urban sustainability by focusing on demonstrations of the possibilities for local food production, by linking directly with farmers in the region, by providing city dwellers and youth with education in growing food and eating healthy food, and by inventing new services such as community kitchens that meet multiple needs.”

While some activists advocate local farmers’ markets and local food production as ways to improve food security, anthropologist Donald Nonini (2013, 271-72) (and others) note that most of these advocates are normally white, wealthy, educated people, most of whom had never been food insecure themselves. In his research on North Carolina, Nonini reported that local farmers’ markets tended to exhibit quite expensive food prices, and that these ‘sustainable-agriculture’ advocates often equated sustainable-agriculture to food security. Nonini also found that food security activists in the area are operating on a much different track than their sustainable-agriculture counterparts, focusing on low-income households, and working with initiatives such as soup kitchens, food banks and food stamps. Nonini found that, unlike the sustainable-agriculture activists, the food security activists did not critique the global food

system with productivist values, because if it were not for this system, these activists claim, there would not be surplus food to be donated to food banks and thus redistributed to those in need.

Food security programs run by local level organizations are a unique form of social organization to study in comparison to international and national initiatives because they tend to be more personal, with employees and volunteers working closely with both strangers and friends, towards food security within their own neighbourhoods. This sense of community can motivate people to help. For example, in his study on food security in communities in North Carolina, Nonini (2013, 271) found that individual involvement in local level food security initiatives was in part due to their feelings of direct connection to the community (i.e. more personal), which they did not feel at the national level. This unique local level aspect is significant in terms of food security initiatives because community members coming together may have a specific understanding of the situation and potential outcomes through lived experiences that persons outside the region may not fully be able grasp. As Martorell (2017, 2) notes, community development has been increasingly a large contributor to food security initiatives which “focus on self-reliance, self-sufficiency, and mutual support.” Because of this, local level organizations can be easier to manage, consider local perspectives with expert knowledge, and have more effective results when compared to national level organizations (see Boyer 2010 on community-based NGOs in Honduras).

2.3 Food Waste: “Ugly Food” and Food Waste Redistribution

The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations reports that approximately one third (1.3 billion tons) of all food produced globally is lost or wasted each year (FAO 2011,

2-5). This translates to roughly USD\$680 billion of food waste in industrialized countries, compared to USD\$310 billion in the developing world, every year. The FAO states that these losses and wastages occurs at different levels which include: agricultural process; post-harvest handling and storage; processing; distribution; and consumption. “[I]n developing countries more than 40% of the food losses occur at post-harvest and processing levels, while in industrialized countries, more than 40% of the food losses occur at retail and consumer levels” (FAO 2011, 5). As these statistics show, it appears that food waste generated at the distribution (retail) and consumer level is an issue specific to industrialized countries. Galli et al. (2019, 292) explain that “surplus food may occur at different stages of the food chain, as a result of marketing strategies, date marking, product and packaging deterioration or errors in forecasting demand, and is considered inevitable to some extent.” This is to say that although mistakes do happen (errors in date marking or packaging), supermarkets continue to bring in *much* more food than needed for fear of running out which, if not sold, gets tossed out as waste.

During his TED Talk on *The Global Food Waste Scandal* (2013), Tristram Stuart reports that Europe, North America, Australia and New Zealand have 150-200% of surplus food over what it would take to nutritionally feed their populations, constantly stocked in their supermarkets and restaurants. Yet despite this, as noted above, many people in industrialized countries continue to be food insecure. Galli et al. (2019, 290) describe this as “the so-called paradox of ‘scarcity within abundance.’” As we can see, we are unable to correlate production of food with the food security of all people. Even more problematic and frustrating is the fact that this surplus food is often deemed as ‘waste’ and ends up in landfills.

In the last several years a number of movements have attempted to combat different areas of food waste. In 2014, an anti-food waste activist from California named Jordan Figueiredo

started the “Ugly Fruit and Veg Campaign” which advocates for the consumption of produce that is not perfectly aesthetically pleasing, rather than tossing it in the compost (Figueiredo 2019). The premise is for supermarkets to sell their mis-shaped fruit and vegetables at a discounted rate. This way, the food is still sold for human consumption instead of being wasted. Now, there are many countries worldwide that have supermarkets participating in the campaign including Canada, the United States, Australia, New Zealand, and many countries in Europe among others. However, there are arguments against this model saying that the reduced price for these surplus foods obscures notions of the over-production of food and perpetuates the “agri-food industry’s warped aesthetic standards” (Turner 2018, 199).

Research shows that urban populations are beginning to display an increased interest in ‘food rescue’ programs, which are a local level initiative (see e.g. Eversole 2014 in Tasmania, Australia; Lee and Diprose 2017 in Wellington, New Zealand; Warshawsky 2015 in Los Angeles, United States). The collection and redistribution of food waste (i.e. food rescue) is an initiative that has been employed in recent years as an attempt to curb how much food is unnecessarily wasted each year. However, perceptions of this practice vary among different people; the mainstream population has typically thought it to be unsavory. At the heart of the idea, organizations operating within a ‘food rescue’ model do so by redirecting food which was destined for landfills for a variety of reasons (e.g. labeled incorrectly, getting close to its expiry date, general surplus) back to consumers for human consumption. According to Sewald et al. (2018, 130), up to 40% of food produced in the United States each year ends up wasted in landfills. Food rescue organizations aim to drastically reduce this number. However, the details of the model operate in a variety of ways depending on the organization. For example, since 1985, *Second Harvest* has been a food rescue organization operating out of Toronto and is

Canada's largest food rescue organization. They provide food to roughly 375 non-profit organizations that feed people in need. There are no criteria for becoming a food recipient organization as the idea behind *Second Harvest* is for surplus food to be *available to all* (Second Harvest 2019). FoodRescue.ca in association with *Second Harvest* matches non-profits with donors, who are then responsible for picking-up and sorting the surplus food themselves. Another example comes from Boulder, Colorado in which Sewald et al. (2018) explain that *Boulder Food Rescue* (originated in 2011) picks-up and redistributes food that otherwise would have been thrown in the compost including surplus items and “ugly food” (explained above). The redirection of ‘waste’ food to feed the food insecure has been touted by advocates as a “win-win” situation addressing both “food surplus reduction and food poverty alleviation” (Galli et al. 2019, 290). However, some critics are skeptical that a program that relies on *surplus* food to feed people is simply not sustainable. Ultimately, Galli et al. (2019, 290) raise concerns that the food rescue model is founded upon the flaws of another model which is that of excessive food production. They question the sustainability of ‘food rescue’ in providing food insecurity relief in the event that food production becomes more closely monitored resulting in a reduction of surplus food and food waste, asking: “What happens to food assistance if food surplus is reduced through waste prevention measures?”

2.4 Food Insecurity in New Zealand

As noted above, the majority of food insecurity research has focused on the ‘developing’ world, in countries with weak economies and overall lower standards of living, but food insecurity is not an issue exclusive to developing countries (Carter et al. 2010; Davis and Geiger 2017). To understand this issue of food insecurity in countries with overall high standards of

living, I have chosen to focus on New Zealand for several reasons which will become apparent throughout this section. Firstly, there are several aspects of New Zealand that make it a unique case to study when compared to other high-income countries: it is an island nation which makes it geographically distinctive and relatively isolated; it has a rather small population of 4.9 million people (Stats NZ 2019) with 744, 800 of the population being Māori peoples who are overrepresented in food insecurity rates; and produces many international exports (\$14.1 billion in 2018) including dairy (butter, milk powder), meats (offal, lamb, mutton, veal, beef) and wine among others. New Zealand's largest exports to the neighbouring Australia are packaged food and beverages (Stats NZ 2019).

New Zealand's employment rate is higher than the OECD (Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development) average and has lower than average labour-market insecurity and job strain (OECD 2017, 1-3). Social support is among the highest of OECD countries, with top tier rankings in each classification of social capital including trust in the national government, trust in the police, volunteering through organization, and voter turnout. Citizens of New Zealand have an average of 82 years life expectancy, which is two years higher than the OECD average. It is in the top third of OECD countries for being least deprived, and in the OECD report from 2017, subjective well-being and life satisfaction in New Zealand had reportedly been stable over the last ten years. In 2018, New Zealand ranked 14 out of 189 countries on the *United Nations Human Development Index* (UN Human Development Reports 2019). To put this in perspective, Canada ranked 13 and the United States 15. Thus, New Zealand according to many measures is a wealthy country with an overall healthy population. Yet despite all of this, there continues to be an alarming number of New Zealanders experiencing food insecurity. Only 60.8% of New Zealand households with children reported to be fully food

secure in 2015-2016 according to the New Zealand Ministry of Health (2017), which is considerably lower than that of Canada and the United States with rates of 84.4% (Tarasuk et al. 2014, 14) and 84.3% (Coleman-Jenson et al. 2108, 17) respectively.

Not only were 19% of New Zealand households with children reported to be food insecure in 2015-2016 (NZ Ministry of Health 2019, 7), Duignan (2011, 5-6) reports that 40% of deaths in New Zealand are related to insufficient fruit and vegetable consumption, being overweight and obesity, of which these health disparities have been proven to be linked to limited healthy food options and over-consumption of cheap unhealthy foods. Duignan (2011, 5) also notes in her report that “insufficient access to food has been linked to chronic illness and negative health outcomes such as cancer, obesity, and diabetes.” Duignan argues that these numbers are not expected to get much better as the cost of basic foods rose for those living in Wellington by 29% from 2004 to the time of publishing in 2011. In a 2012 study focused on adolescents in New Zealand, Utter et al. (2018, 32) found that 11% of high school aged students were “often or always” food insecure, while 33% reported being “occasionally or sometimes” food insecure.

Though outside the purview of my thesis but still worth considering, is that one factor contributing to increases in food insecurity in New Zealand is the price of food on this island nation, which may be affected by multiple elements. For example, “climate change, rising oil prices and economic factors” (Duignan 2011, 6) can affect the availability of food in New Zealand, which in turn affect prices. Duignan goes on to claim that New Zealand is particularly vulnerable to fluctuation of oil prices in which higher prices for oil lead to “increases in the cost of nearly all economic activity”, food prices included. Also, beyond the scope of my thesis, yet still very interesting and noteworthy, are the statistics on food insecurity of the indigenous

population (Māori) of New Zealand. Carter et al. (2010, 603) report that food insecurity among Māori populations is up to 36%, arguing that low income and high cost of healthy food are the leading causes of food insecurity among this population. The New Zealand Ministry of Health (2019, 17) reported that of the 19% of households with children that reported being food insecure in 2015-2016, 37.1% were Pacific Islanders, 28.6% were Māori, 15.4% were European/other, and 8.5% were Asian. As we can see, racialized groups are overrepresented in New Zealand food insecurity statistics.

In attempt to mitigate the cost of rising food prices, community gardens have been gaining popularity among New Zealand neighborhoods (Duignan 2011), as have alternative food networks (AFNS) including community supported agriculture, food rescue initiatives, and local farmers' markets (Dwiartama et al. 2016). These types of alternative food initiatives operating at the local level may have even greater effects than solely providing food to those in need. Research from Dwiartama et al. (2016, 156) in Dunedin, New Zealand, showed that AFNS provided “insights on personal values, beliefs and direct relationships in the construction of market and market-relations” and go on to say that “trust and regard seem to be the pivot around which these networks are built as a way to develop new economic forms and relationships.” Therefore, AFNS not only provide food, but create stronger communities where individuals work together as a group. Examples of AFNS operating at the local level in New Zealand include: *Kai Auckland*; *Edible Christchurch*; and *A Seed and a Wish* (Wellington), to name a few. *Restoring New Zealand's Food System* is an initiative working to “help find solutions to the challenges in the food system, from production, manufacturing, distribution, access and eating through to waste” (Sustainable Business Network 2019). Other organizations working to reduce food waste through ‘food rescue’ by food redistribution to those in need are *The Free Store* and *Kaibosh* (the

focus of my research), both located in Wellington. There are also 15 other ‘food rescue’ organizations operating in nine cities throughout the country. From these examples we can see there is no shortage of local initiatives throughout New Zealand working to address food insecurity through different ways on multiple levels.

2.5 Conceptual Frameworks for Understanding Food Systems

Food Utopias

As outlined above and as Stock et al. (2015, 4-6) note, the most dominant discussion around issues of food security has been centered around the productivity and commodity model. Caloric output, miracle foods that are versatile and easy to grow, and cheap but unhealthy foods that are quick and easy have been a focus and ‘solution’ for many involved in mediating issues of hungry people. Stock et al. raise the question: What if there was a different way to think about food, that was not only concerned with feeding populations through quantity (not always quality foods), but focused on the process of how we “do food”?

According to Stock et al. (2015, 3-6), food utopias offer new and different ways of thinking about foodways and suggest hope of what could be for our food systems and food futures. These authors claim that food utopias can provide not only a framework, but a tool of mediation between thought and action, which can create more space for possibilities around the ideas of food. Drawing on Ricoeur, Stock et al. describe utopias as the opposite of ideology: whereas ideology sits comfortably within a dominant way of thinking, utopias break this cycle and offer new alternatives. This concept rejects the strict binary of successful or unsuccessful in terms of food projects, as it is seen more of a process producing new knowledge and ways of

doing things. Drawing on Levitas, Stock et al. (2015, 4) note that utopias enable us to reconsider the “structural limits of what is thinkable.” In addition, food utopias recognize problems with the current system- for example *access* to food- and come up with alternatives- for example food rescue programs- that may be imperfect but offer hope and a way forward. As Stock et al. (2015, 6) claim: “It’s in this shared relationship of tools as both a process and a lack of mastery that food utopias can serve as a mediator – a bridge between different assumptions of how the world should be, how it is – and in developing new ideas – experiments – for creating a more just and sustainable food system.”

Food utopias allow us to imagine and experiment with foodways because they advocate for fundamental changes to the food system (Stock et al. 2015, 21-6). Different forms of food utopias are seen in agroecology and organic farming, both of which seek to address the quality of food as well as the adverse environmental impacts of industrial food production which often create much food waste. As discussed above, various other food utopias such as urban food gardens, links between local farmers and urban food security organizations and food rescue schemes are increasingly being used to address the problem of urban food insecurity in ‘developed’ countries with overall high standards of living. Each of these initiatives challenge what we think ‘food security’ means and provides alternative perspectives on how we might go about addressing the needs of food insecure peoples.

It is noted that working with food utopias has its limitations. According to Stock et al. (2015, 7), utopias do not offer all the ‘answers’ in alleviating food insecurity. I believe it is important not to conflate the concept of food utopias with the perfect solution to hunger. If recognized for their *possibilities* and not uncritically promoted, I believe that the concept of food utopias can serve as a productive tool that enables a more open-minded discourse to arrive at a

destination where new possibilities in the food system may be perceived, conceptualized and in the best case, realized. How well they might do this and what they create- both materially and otherwise- for of those experiencing food insecurity in urban areas was the focus of my study.

The Social Life of Commodities

As we know, food is an interesting commodity because its main point of desirability is to feed people; it is essential to human life. However, we also know that food does much more than physically nourish our bodies. In *The Social Life of Things* (Appadurai 1986, 2), Appadurai discusses the social life of commodities. Appadurai argues that “commodities, like persons, have social lives” and that if we focus on the item itself that is being exchanged rather than the mode of exchange, we can see that its changing value is socially constructed. In other words, value is established through varying politics of time, space, and context as the commodity interacts with different actors throughout the course of its ‘life’ (journey). Appadurai uses many examples throughout his work to illustrate this point including food items such as wheat and sugar, and other material items such as postage stamps and antiques.

Drawing on Georg Simmel, Appadurai (1986, 3-4) suggests that commodities do not have an inherent value, rather, their value is determined by the judgement of individuals or entities (consumers). In this way, *economic* value can be determined by one’s commitment to give up a currently owned object to replace it with a new object (i.e. paying money to obtain material items) which Appadurai calls an “exchange of sacrifices.” He goes on to explain that attributing certain values to certain objects this way does not account for their *meaning*. This is where Appadurai argues we must follow the object on its path (throughout its “life”, so to speak) to understand its meaning, value, and how these aspects might change as the object moves along its path. According to Appadurai (1986, 4), “it is only through the analysis of these trajectories

that we can interpret the human transactions and calculations that enliven things [...] from a methodological point of view it is the things-in-motion that illuminate their human and social context.” That is to say that methodologically, if we follow the object and see what it is making possible and creating outside of its original “value”, we will uncover how its value has changed.

In following the object, Appadurai (1986, 13-6) makes it clear that we must move away from production dominated discourse prominent in Marxian views of commodities and instead focus on the entire trajectory (life) of the object. This also illuminates the fact that commodities can move “in and out of the commodity state” for different reasons at different times. He argues that the past, present, and future of commodities create a social significance when considering the social life of an object because it aids in determining its value. In other words, what has this object been able to create? Did it create, influence, or aid something unimaginable to when it was first conceived? What is the (new) potential of this object? From here Appadurai goes on to talk about “paths and diversions” in which he explains that commodities may have a certain trajectory they are meant to fulfill, however, somewhere along the line their value might change in which case they diverge from this original path. For these objects to flow in and out of the commodity state, Appadurai (1986, 15) notes that “commoditization lies at the complex intersection of temporal, cultural, and social factors.” This is largely how value is socially constructed by those who come into contact with said commodities.

Things become more complex when we think not only about the flow-like state of objects shifting between states of commodity and non-commodity throughout the course of their life in accordance with its current social and political placement, but also (drawing on work from Davenport) that some objects are produced with the intent to become a “terminal commodity” (Appadurai 1986, 23-6). That is to say its “life” comes to an end after its *one* journey from

production to consumer and is otherwise incapable of returning to a commodity state after it has been classified as a non-commodity. This adds more layers to our ideas of *value* and *meaning* as well as what one views as a commodity, and might serve as a niche understanding (such as in ritual as Appadurai explains) in which the meaning and purpose of some objects are for it to only live one life. This raises questions such as: Who decides (and how) what is intended to have one linear journey as oppose to existing in a flow state; and what happens to (the life of) objects that become repurposed?

In chapter two of *The Social Life of Commodities*, Kopytoff (1986, 64-6) explains the complex biographies of commodities. He notes that the same commodity might be considered as such by some people and not by others at the same time. Again, his work demonstrates that value is highly subjective, and one cannot always assume that an object means the same thing to one's neighbour. Kopytoff explains that commodities may be both *decommodified* and *recommodified*, which encompasses a process of changing values that corresponds with the "cultural shaping of biographies" of commodities. Kopytoff highlights the complexity of determining biographies in that we are offered a range of possibilities due to the fact that different societies can come to different conclusions for different reasons about the same commodities. Therefore, value is not inherent and it can certainly change throughout the life-course of the commodity.

Inspired by Appadurai, Wagner (2013, 2) wrote about *The Social Life of Water* which is a term he uses "to encompass all domains of human relationships including the political, economic, technological, and spiritual" to discuss water in particular. Drawing on Orlove and Caton, Wagner (2013, 2-3) claims that "water connects different domains of social life to each other" and as it runs through its life-cycle "it establishes connections among all life forms and

between animate and inanimate worlds.” Wagner goes on to argue that “social practices shape and are shaped by water.” Thus, food, like water, can be considered a commodity or non-commodity and has multiple values as it is used or thought of in different ways according to its current cultural context in time and space resulting in the generation of new value(s).

Wagner (2013, 8) also incorporates Latour’s arguments on actor-network-theory to suggest that water (and other commodities) possess a level of agency. That is, commodities can also influence the current cultural context and situation, as we will see in the following chapters. Wagner defines agency in this way not along the lines of intentionality, but with *impact*. If considered from this angle, agency of commodities might be possible. Here, we can consider that humans indeed may be influenced and ‘shaped’ by commodities (and non-commodities). However, I do not subscribe to Latour’s arguments that all actors are in equal dialogue with one another; I do believe humans who are able to possess *both* intentionality and impact assert a different type of agency than commodities which possess solely impact. However, as commodities may shape us, and we them, it is certainly interesting to consider commodities as having a level of agency for their effects on humans (that are sometimes unexpected).

Employing *The Social Life of Things* as a method of analysis does help us to understand how value is created and is able to change, however, it does have its limitations in that Appadurai focuses exclusively on *commodities* (i.e. items with both use value and exchange value) within a system of exchange, and does not account for the value of objects once they lose their “commodity” status. However, goods can continue to circulate even after they are no longer in the market exchange system, and therefor still have value. As we can see, this method of study still allows us to examine (changing) values of objects, regardless of their “commodity” or “non-

commodity” status. My study is concerned with food for its values both within and without “commodity” status, for when food enters the gift economy, it certainly still has value.

2.6 Anthropology of Food and Food Insecurity: The Ethnographic Method

Food has been of anthropological interest since the latter part of the 19th century when Garrick Mallery and William Robertson Smith took it up as a topic of study (Mintz and Du Bois 2002, 99). As Mintz and Du Bois (2002, 100) have shown, anthropological studies of food are numerous ranging from political-economic value creation, and food supplies and war frequency, to the social construction of memory. Johan Pottier was one of the first anthropologists to make a significant contribution to studies of food insecurity. Through the anthropological method, Pottier focused on “the social backgrounds behind food insecurity and the projects meant to alleviate it” (Mintz and Du Bois 2002, 106). According to Mintz and Du Bois, to better understand the different aspects of food security, Pottier explored many topics which include “intrahousehold allocation of resources, gender inequality, peasants’ risk management, effects of the Green Revolution, rural class polarization, local agricultural knowledge and meanings, constraints on small food marketers, loss of genetic diversity, and effective famine intervention” (Mintz and Du Bois 2002, 106).

In Pottier’s (1999) *Anthropology of Food: The Social Dynamics of Food Security*, he devotes a chapter to ‘food security in policy and practice’, in which he emphasizes the ‘practice’ aspect through research of lived experiences with those experiencing food insecurity. He first outlines how the FAO describes food (in)security, but the research gets most interesting when the anthropological method is introduced which encompasses digging deep to go beyond the

neatly defined criteria of ‘food security’ in policy, to discover what is happening on the ground and the messiness of reality in practice. Pottier (1999, 15-8) points out that if policy is to be effective in addressing food insecurity, policy makers must understand the diversity of those who are food insecure, and their differing experiences with “aid programs and markets.” He highlights that the anthropological method offers a way to research food insecurity that is more closely linked to those who experience it, through “ground-level observations.” More specifically, ethnographic observations aid in the understanding of perceptions surrounding food and livelihoods which are shaped through lived experiences.

Anthropologist Chelsea Wentworth (2016, 137) likewise used this ethnographic method to study malnutrition, food insecurity and the sociality of *lafets* (community feasts) in Porta Villa, Vanuatu, as mentioned earlier. Through living in the village, attending *lafets* and talking with members of the community, Wentworth discovered that children from families who did not have enough food to eat would regularly attend *lafets* to gain access to food and were never turned away, as per common practice. However, their presence did generate gossip among the community, which made a private family matter of food insecurity very public and created a poor social image of the family in question among the rest of the community. It was by spending time in the village with the people who lived there, that Wentworth was able to gather very detailed data of what was happening and the reality of the situation, which was not only hungry children attending community feasts, but the serious social implications it created for their families.

Though not an anthropologist, geographer Thomas Perreault (2013, 329-37) also used an ethnographic approach in his study of agrobiodiversity and food security among the Kichwa peoples of Mondayacu in the Ecuadorian Amazon. Perreault used in-depth household surveying,

open-ended interviews, and participant observation to understand the role of subsistence agriculture in a market-oriented region where cash crops were the main source of income. It was through these ethnographic methods that Perreault came to realize that *chacras* (household swidden gardens) are indeed still used and closely linked to household food security, and concluded that *chacras* acted as a ‘safety net’ against the market economy if/when cash-crops were to fail.

Following this anthropological tradition in studying food insecurity, I used an ethnographic approach for my research because it offered an avenue to gain insight on both the perspectives of individual recipients of food aid, and the program coordinators who facilitate these initiatives. As we will see in the following chapter, the use of participant observation and open-end interviews allowed me to gain an understanding of the state of food rescue in Wellington, New Zealand, and the impacts it has on its recipients. As the multiple and changing value(s) food waste has for its recipients will be highlighted throughout the thesis, we will see that food rescue carried out in this way (via Kaibosh) may indeed serve as a food utopia, capable of experimentation for different foodways.

Chapter 3: Methods and Research Design

3.1 An Ethnographic Case Study

In order to better understand how alternative food aid programs operate and interact with individuals who are food insecure, I conducted a nine-week exploratory ethnographic case study of the food aid organization “Kaibosh Food Rescue”, in Wellington, New Zealand from June 24th, 2019 until August 24th, 2019. I spent approximately 12-15 hours per week (give or take) at Kaibosh volunteering and observing for a total of roughly 130 hours; I spent approximately 30 hours visiting five different Kaibosh-supported charities; and I conducted 11 interviews in total. Kaibosh is a food rescue program that redistributes free food that is considered waste and/or surplus from registered supermarkets and cafes to registered charitable organizations in need in the Wellington area. In order to understand food security from the perspective of multiple stakeholders, the focus of study was Kaibosh as an organization and the charities they support, as well as food insecure individuals using their services. I found an ethnographic method of inquiry appropriate for exploring this topic because it breathes life into the social world of food insecurity, allowing me to see the day-to-day operation and experiences of organizations and recipients, hear from food recipients directly- the voices of those who are the target of such food aid programs- and participate in food aid operations which gave me the opportunity to get to know and meet many food aid personnel and food recipients. This facilitated my learning about lived experiences of food recipients, the relationships seen at Kaibosh and their charities and subsequently the multiple value(s) of rescued food.

An ethnographic approach is a method that encompasses working and living among those who are located where the phenomenon is taking place. It means learning about the social issue from the perspective of those who are directly involved. Through both participant observation

and interviewing techniques (which will be explained below), an ethnographic approach provided unique insight into the everyday happenings surrounding redirected food waste. It permitted me to learn about the daily operations of Kaibosh including where, how, and what types of food are collected, where they are redistributed, who exactly the food is going to on both the individual level and the charitable organization level, and how these individuals and charities make use of the food.

3.2 Project Design

In order to gain an understanding of food security from the perspective of multiple stakeholders and of the full range of values this rescued food had to its recipients, I conducted my research with a “follow the thing” (Appadurai 1986; Marcus 1995) approach as the food came into contact with different actors and exchanged hands. Working with Kaibosh was one point in a web of multiple local charity initiatives, all of which involved the distribution of food. I used Kaibosh as the ‘hub’ of my field site, while following along the avenues that those who are food insecure may find themselves. Thus, I followed the food along these lines of connections that were both intentionally and unintentionally created among individuals and local charitable organizations. This enabled me to gain a better understanding of how food aid initiatives impact those who are food insecure.

Through my fieldwork, I intended to locate Kaibosh within this larger network of local action to gain insight to my main research question: How do alternative food aid programs create space for new food system possibilities and interact with individuals who are food insecure? This provided a space to analyze not only how perceptions of alternative food initiatives might be

changing, but also what value(s) rescued food has for the urban food insecure. This was made possible through a multi-sited fieldwork (Marcus 1995) with both Kaibosh and multiple recipient charities which allowed me to follow the food and gain insight on the different values rescued food has to the different people it came into contact with as it moved through different spaces. As mentioned in the previous chapter, following commodities through their social lives was first proposed by Appadurai (1986), but, was later taken up and expanded on by Marcus (1995, 106-07) in which he traces the path of objects through multiple sites and their respected different contexts. I followed the food from supermarket, to Kaibosh headquarters, to multiple charities, to individual recipients, which allowed me to understand the different values food gained, maintained, and lost along the way.

3.3 Data Collection Methods

The two primary methods I employed for data collection were participant observation with Kaibosh staff and recipient charities, and interviewsⁱⁱ (both unstructured and semi-structured) with food rescue stakeholders including Kaibosh staff, Kaibosh funders, Kaibosh recipient charities, and individual food recipients. I also conducted a follow-along with a director of one of the recipient charities of Kaibosh to gain insight on what their everyday work looks like as they visited multiple sites.

Participant observation allowed me to gain an inside perspective on how this alternative food initiative (food rescue) works and how it effects its recipients. Throughout my participant observation with Kaibosh I engaged in unstructured interviews and casual conversations which first enabled me to obtain an initial impression of the food aid situation in Wellington and

provided me with a live orientation of the organization. It was also a good way to establish trust between myself and members of the organization. Through my daily volunteer work and communications with Kaibosh staff and volunteers, I learned how Kaibosh operates, how it is organized, how food gets to those in need, and which charitable organizations are registered.

Through interviews with individuals using these food services, I was able to gain some insight into the lived experiences of food recipients such as how they use food from Kaibosh and the impact that the charity they are registered with has had on their lives. Interviews conducted with Kaibosh staff and other stakeholders provided me with concrete examples and anecdotes on the organization of these initiatives and what their goals and mandates were.

In addition to interviewing, participant observation, and following the food, I conducted document and social media analysis both while in the field and after having returned from the field. I read through online reports that Kaibosh and other local alternative food initiatives had published. This helped me to understand how Kaibosh and other initiatives (e.g., those who offer lunch programs to underprivileged children; those who teach cooking classes; those who teach vegetable gardening, etc.) are explaining and promoting their mission to the public. I also monitored Kaibosh's social media accounts (Facebook and Instagram), as well as the accounts of other food aid initiatives in the Wellington area. Through 'comments' and 'shares' on these social media sites, I could obtain an idea of how Wellington residents were perceiving Kaibosh and other food aid initiatives in the Wellington area. This analysis helped provide insight to my objective of learning how the general public perceives alternative food initiatives. It also helped me to understand whether a space might be opening for alternative food programs to be accepted, and how they might be organized and operated.

3.4 Participant Observation: Volunteering at Kaibosh

My volunteer duties with Kaibosh included: sorting the collected food at Kaibosh headquarters; accompanying the food rescue truck driver to pick up ‘food waste’ from donors; and helping with the facilitation of charity food pick ups in the morning. I originally intended for my time to be spent largely in the sorting warehouse and completing food drop-offs to organizations because I believed these activities would warrant the most interactions with volunteers and recipients. However, when I arrived at my field site, I learned that Kaibosh does not deliver food to charities, rather, coordinators from the charities pick it up from the Kaibosh headquarters. My volunteering shifts were then mainly on the food rescue truck (one to two days per week), as well as a food sorting shift every other week. The days I spent on the food rescue truck were normally between Monday and Thursday with Gordon, and were generally from 9:00 a.m.- 3:00 p.m., give or take an hour depending how much food there was to pick up on the given day. These shifts, along with my food sorting shifts were when I spoke with other volunteers. The morning food distribution shifts were where I met coordinators of recipient charities. My observations through volunteering over the nine-week period also helped in triangulating the data collected throughout interviews with staff members.

3.5 Visiting Kaibosh’s Recipient Charities

I visited Kaibosh’s recipient charities for multiples reasons: to get a first-hand sense of the atmosphere and daily operations at the charity’s facility; to see how the charity used Kaibosh food; and finally, to meet some of their recipients whom I could ask to interview. The first charity I went to visit was the *Boys & Girls Institute* (BGI). I met the coordinators of BGI while

volunteering with Kaibosh on an ad hoc food drop-off at their facility. I told them about my project and Karen (one of the coordinators) invited me to join her to visit the Dixon Street Flats for the *Free Café* the following week so I could see one of the ways in which they use the food received from Kaibosh. The Dixon Street Flats is a subsidized housing apartment complex across the street from the BGI headquarters, and BGI provides food for these building residents each Thursday (at the *Free Café*). After this initial meeting, I returned to BGI the following week to visit the *Free Café* to see how it works. Before the *Free Café* opened, I engaged in an unstructured interview with Karen about the programs BGI offers, the demographic of clients they serve (single parents, refugees, etc.), and a new project she is working on (an initiative to address homelessness in Wellington). After our conversation I visited the *Free Café*, where I spoke with one of the coordinators there about the café and with some of the building residents who are recipients. I visited BGI a third time to conduct an interview with a recipient that Karen had previously spoken to and selected for me.

I was introduced to another Kaibosh recipient charity, *WELLfed*, by one of the Kaibosh staff named Natasha whom I had met while I was at the Kaibosh headquarters one afternoon. *WELLfed* is an organization that offers free cooking classes to residents in the Porirua area and teaches students about food waste reduction and food budgeting. Natasha volunteers at *WELLfed* once a week to look after the kids while their parents attend the cooking class. Natasha had heard about my research and invited me to join her and I ended up volunteering for three consecutive weeks at *WELLfed*. I attended the cooking classes to chat and help with those who were learning, as well as helped watch the kids in the next room when Natasha needed an extra hand. I also attended the communal meals at the end of each class where I heard stories of gaining confidence in the kitchen and sharing food with friends. I had originally thought this would be a morning

visit for a couple of hours to see what *WELLfed* did, and to find a participant to interview.

However, it turned into participant observation over the course of three weeks in which I both carried out volunteer duties (9:00 a.m.- 2:00 p.m. once a week) and interviewed two recipients.

I also made one-time visits to three other charities that Kaibosh supports which were: the *Wellington City Mission* (WCM); *Linden Social Centre*; and the *Strathmore Community Centre*. The purpose of these visits was to get an idea of what their charity did and how they used Kaibosh food, with the exception of WCM in which I also interviewed organizational personnel and posted a recruitment poster for individual recipients to interview. The connections I had at Kaibosh facilitated my visit to WCM; after speaking with Mark, Kaibosh's general manager, he suggested I contact Amy, (the foodbank coordinator) at WCM because he thought she might be able to help me with finding participants to interview. Originally the purpose of my visit to WCM was to meet with Amy to tell her about my project before posting a participant recruitment poster for recipients at their facility. While on site, I ended up conducting a semi-structured interview with Sarah, an on-site social work, and Amy. I also posted a participant recruitment poster for interviews and followed Amy for a tour of their facility in which she explained how their food bank and free daily lunches worked.

At the *Linden Social Centre*, I conducted a follow-along for one afternoon with the coordinator as she drove around to multiple sites making pick-ups and drop-offs, I also attended their communal lunch to get a better sense of what their initiative offered to those in need. I visited the *Strathmore Community Centre* one morning so I could both see what their organization did, and to meet and interview recipients who were there to pick-up food parcels. I spent roughly five hours here while I interviewed three recipients and mingled with others.

3.6 Interviews and Participant Recruitment

Key Organizational Personnel:

To gain some insight on the operation and design of food aid in Wellington, I conducted semi-structured interviews with five food aid organization personnel to understand things from the organizational perspective. I interviewed three tiers of stakeholders which represented Kaibosh staff, a Kaibosh funder, and a Kaibosh recipient charity. These specific stakeholders were: three Kaibosh management and operational staff; Becky who is the Sustainable Food Systems Lead for the Food Sustainability Department of the *Wellington City Council* which awards funding to Kaibosh (and other initiatives in the city); and Amy and Sandra who hold positions as the Food Bank Coordinator and on-site Social Worker respectively at the *Wellington City Mission*, which is a charity that Kaibosh supports.

Recruiting Kaibosh staff to interview was facilitated by the fact that I was volunteering with them two to three days a week. I decided to interview three different staff members who held different positions within Kaibosh so I could obtain different perspectives. Each position has its own responsibilities and each position involves interacting with different people within the system. The three food aid personnel from Kaibosh I selected were: Mark the general manager of Kaibosh; Andy the operations manager of the Wellington City location; and Liam the general manager of the Lower Hutt location. They were all males in their 40s. I selected these three to interview because there is only one head manager of Kaibosh (Mark), and as the operations are generally larger scale at the Wellington location, I chose to interview Andy as well. As for Liam, I wanted to make sure I obtained a point of view from Kaibosh's second (and slightly smaller) headquarters in Lower Hutt. I believe this provided me with a well-rounded group of participants to represent Kaibosh. These interviews helped in gaining an understanding

on the following aspects: the structure of Kaibosh and their operational network; how they find supplies (both food and funds) and recipients; their mission and core values; how Kaibosh is promoted in Wellington; and finally, if/how organization staff feel that food rescue initiatives are opening a space for alternative foodways to be accepted.

Food Aid Recipients:

To obtain the perspective of food recipients, I conducted semi-structured interviews with six individuals who are food recipients of three different food-aid organizations. One woman who volunteers at the *Boys & Girls Institute* as well as participates in BGI social programming, two women from *WELLfed*- one of whom is currently a student in the program and one who graduated from student to volunteer teacher- and three recipients from the *Strathmore Community Centre* of which two were female and one male. All six recipients appeared to be 35-55 years of age and all were currently unemployed (with the exception of Jane being “on-call” as an early childhood educator) and had been for at least 6 months. I attempted to conduct these interviews with recipients in the format of a modified, life-history interview. This provided an understanding into how exactly they experience food insecurity and the impacts of participating in programing with this charity has had on their lives. During the interviews with food recipients, I asked questions on individuals’ education and employment status. This information helped to illustrate a small snapshot of the demographic and experiences of those who are receiving food aid in urban New Zealand.

To recruit food recipient participants for interviews, I originally posted a recruitment flyer at two locations that offered lunches for people in need who live in the Wellington City area: the *Wellington City Mission* (mentioned above); and the *Newtown Community & Cultural Centre*. After two weeks this recruitment method did not prove to be successful. I was struggling

to find recipients, so I reached out directly to contacts I had made through Kaibosh in the charitable organization field who then offered to help facilitate interviews with individual recipients from their respective charities. This allowed me to interview six individual recipients from three different charities supported by Kaibosh: The *Boys & Girls Institute*; *WELLfed*; and the *Strathmore Community Centre*. These charities were chosen through a ‘convenience’ sample in that they were charities whose representatives I had happened to meet during my work days volunteering at Kaibosh- with the difference for *WELLfed* being that I was introduced to this charity through a Kaibosh staff member I happened to meet one day while at Kaibosh headquarters.

Coordinators from the *Boys & Girls Institute (BGI)*, *WELLfed*, and the *Strathmore Community Centre* invited me to go with them to visit their charity headquarters so I could first see what they do before asking individual recipients to participate in interviews. When I visited the *Strathmore Community Centre*, before introducing me to the group of residents who were waiting to pick up their food parcels, the coordinator had given me permission to ask residents myself if they would like to participate in an interview. I sat with them and explained my project in more depth to a few people, and then asked them if I could interview them for my project. These ended up being the recipients I interviewed at this charity, as everyone who I asked agreed to participate. I used a similar approach at *WELLfed* to find individual recipients to interview, however before I interviewed anyone, I had been volunteering at this initiative for a few weeks (mentioned above), which facilitated the process of finding recipients who were interested and willing to participate in my project. At BGI, Karen had contacted a few of their clients herself to find out if any of them would be willing to participate in an interview with me, to which one agreed.

3.7 Analysis and Limitations

The interviews I conducted generated audio recordings which I transcribed using *Transcribe Wreally* software. In coding and analyzing fieldnotes and interview transcripts, I looked for evidence of how this food distribution program is organized and operated, the presence of social and facilitation relationships, as well as the impact Kaibosh (and their recipient charities) had on individuals who use their services. I categorized my findings into themes: material benefits (e.g. nutrition); and other human capital/ social benefits (e.g. enhanced social life, cooking skills, empowerment). I used these themes as indicators of the various and changing values of this rescued food.

The sample of recipients I interviewed was not ‘random’, so this is an initial limitation of my research. Using a ‘convenience’ sample to find individual recipients meant I interviewed recipients who happened to be present the day of my visit to the charity, and in the case of BGI, the coordinator could have asked individual recipients who are more social or have a ‘very good story’. In addition, six participants is too small of a sample to draw any generalizable conclusions, however, it does lend a glimpse into some recipients’ perspectives on food (in)security and food rescue. Another limitation regarding interviewing recipients that I experienced was that it was very uncomfortable to ask for people’s exact ages. When I did attempt to ask a couple of recipients for their age (to help illustrate the demographic of food insecure individuals that I interviewed), they were clearly uncomfortable with answering so I took it out of my interview guide. I suspect that if I spent more time in the field and these recipients became more familiar with me, they might be more willing to offer personal information such as their age, as well as other aspects of their lives.

An additional limitation was the quality of my interviews and what information I was able to collect, due to my lack of experience in conducting field research. While transcribing my interviews both while in the field and (mainly) after returning from the field, I began realizing that I could have probed my interviewees further to obtain more depth and meaning to the information I was gathering. Although, since I started reflecting on my interviews while still in the field, I was able to adjust my interview guide slightly to be able to obtain more data in the interviews. I was noticing a theme of social relationships appearing throughout my fieldwork while I was in the field, but it was not until I returned from the field and began analyzing my fieldnotes in further detail that the social relationship aspect started to become even more apparent. I believe if I was in the field for a longer period of time, I would have had time to create more of a relationship between myself and the recipient participants, reflect more on my work while in the field, adjust my interview guide and style accordingly, and conduct follow-up interviews to include more dialogue relating to social relationships and social networks as well as more detailed food insecurity histories. However, due to time constraints that was not possible for this project.

Chapter 4: Case Study on Kaibosh Food Rescue: From Commodity to Food Waste to Nutritional Value

The idea of collecting food that was destined for the landfill and giving it to people in need can seem harsh, demeaning, or unsavory for some. What does it mean to give this “food waste” to people who otherwise would not have much food at all? When I started working with Kaibosh and saw for myself the beautiful foods they were collecting from supermarkets that were considered “food waste,” I was blown away. I was shocked that foods that were still in such good condition were being thrown away prior to the idea of “food rescue.” I came to the realization that for the most part, labeling food as ‘waste’ had more to do with priorities in having access to abundance above all else, “perfect food esthetics,” and quite possibly supermarkets exhibiting an exaggeration of ‘erring on the side of caution’ for fear of lawsuits, than it did with the actual quality of the food.

Though the food Kaibosh rescues from supermarkets is no longer a commodity in the market exchange system, its life is far from over as it continues to embody much nutritional value. Just as Appadurai (1986) discusses the social life of commodities and their complex biographies, I will detail the social life of rescued food through its journey from a commodity state being exchanged for money, to becoming ‘food waste’ (deemed by supermarkets to have no exchange value and therefore unusable), and finally to a non-commodity state while entering the gift economy where it regains value as it is distributed to those in need of food. Thus, after detailing the history and premise of Kaibosh, I will ‘follow the food’ (Appadurai 1986) to illuminate the journey of rescued food. The multiple actors that rescued food comes into contact with- Kaibosh, charities and individual recipients- will be outlined to not only explain how Kaibosh and its affiliated charity organizations operate, but to highlight the multiple values this food has for different people. Just when we thought “food waste” marked the end-of-life for these supermarket foods (‘terminal commodities’), Kaibosh stepped in and opened up another realm of possibilities.

4.1 Historical Development of Kaibosh: “Zero food poverty. Zero food waste.”

Kaibosh is a food rescue organization that operates out of Wellington, New Zealand. It is an organization that collects from donors, food which otherwise would have been thrown away and re-distributes it to charities in need that are providing food and a range of social services to the needy of Wellington, for free. “*Kai*” is the Māori word for “food”, and “*kibosh*” means “to put an end to something.” Therefore, the *Kaibosh* name reflects their commitment to putting an end to hunger and to food waste.

Kaibosh began in 2008 when a café named *Wishbone* called the *Wellington Women’s Refuge* to ask if they wanted to pick up the extra sandwiches they had at their shop that day. Ruby, a volunteer at the Women’s Refuge, picked up the sandwiches and brought them back to the facility for the women. After this initial contact, Ruby began picking up extra food from *Wishbone* once a week, and then twice a week, until eventually *Wishbone* was giving them so much food that they had too much that could be consumed by those at the Women’s Refuge. These surplus items were foods with ‘use by’ dates of the following day, so they should be eaten the day they were received from *Wishbone*. Ruby called the *Wellington City Mission* to ask if clients there could make use of this food, and so she began making drop-offs to the Mission once a week in addition to the Women’s Refuge. As this was happening in 2008 during the global economic crisis when New Zealanders were starting to feel the effects of the market crash (prices for housing and food were on the rise), Ruby began to conduct some informal research online about food insecurity and food waste. She then had an idea: what if organizations who support people in need could be matched up with cafes who have surplus food to give away each week? The ball started rolling as Ruby and her husband Greg began approaching cafes with Ruby’s idea and then re-distributing this food to charities around the city. The response from small cafes in

Wellington City was very positive once word started to get around about what Ruby and Greg were doing. This initiative started very small-scale and informal, but soon became too much for Ruby and Greg to handle alone. They started bringing in friends and family members to help as volunteers, but it still was not enough as the initiative was growing very quickly. Ruby and Greg realized they needed a headquarters facility to store and sort through the food, and more personnel to help with logistics such as setting up more donors and charities and organizing volunteers. Kaibosh applied for funding from the *Wellington City Council* and the *Lotteries Commission*. Once they successfully received funding, they were able to hire their first employee, Lina, who set up official operating systems for Kaibosh to connect with businesses and charities, organized volunteers, and sorted out how Kaibosh would work moving forward. Lina also created a step-by-step manual on how to start a food rescue organization and made this information available as open-source data online so anyone could set up their own food rescue initiative in their city. Ruby said the idea behind this was so that people “could then use that information to best meet the needs of their own communities” (Kaibosh 2019). During an interview with Andy, the Kaibosh operations manager, he said that “the complete openness of the intellectual property is something that we can be really proud of.” Today, there are 15 food rescue organizations operating throughout New Zealand.

In 2012 Kaibosh was named *Supreme Winner of the 2012 Trustpower National Community Awards* (Kaibosh 2019) out of over 20 charities and organizations from across New Zealand. This served as validation for Kaibosh that their idea was working and being not only acknowledged but embraced by the country. This gave Ruby and Greg the confidence to take the next step and hire more staff members to be able to grow Kaibosh into a larger organization. Mark was hired as the General Manager of Kaibosh in 2012 and when Ruby stepped down from

her Kaibosh Chair position in 2014, she felt as though the organization was in very good hands and felt satisfied that Kaibosh had grown into a *sustainable* food rescue organization to help those in need, which was the initial goal. She explained: “For us [Ruby and Greg], Kaibosh was about solving a big problem. It was an experiment to see if we could provide a solution” (Kaibosh 2019).

In 2012 when Kaibosh was transitioning into becoming a larger professional operation with paid staff, one of the first challenges was convincing larger supermarkets to donate their surplus food for fear of legal repercussions. For example, what would happen if someone became ill after eating food that a supermarket had donated to Kaibosh? Who would be responsible? As the foods being donated are close to their expiry dates, this was a real concern. Mark, the general manager, recognized this as an ongoing issue preventing Kaibosh from breaking into the supermarket sector to create partnerships with these larger shops. Having supermarkets as donors would allow Kaibosh to collect not only ready-meals and baked goods (as they did with cafes), but fresh produce, dairy and meat as well. As a result of this roadblock, Kaibosh staff lobbied for a bill to be passed in parliament to resolve this issue. Mark worked closely with members of parliament to create, draft, and successfully pass a new bill called *The Good Samaritan Clause* as part of the New Zealand Food Act which states that any business that donates food to a charity in good faith is exempt from all legal liability (should an eventual consumer become ill). It protects donations to all charities in New Zealand, not only food rescue organizations. This gave potential donors the piece-of-mind and legal protection they needed in order to register as a food donor with Kaibosh. Mark said it was tough to build up their list of donors in the beginning, but once this bill was passed and more businesses started signing on, the donor list grew from there. So, what started out as two people collecting surplus baked goods from cafes on their days off and

redistributing it to charities, has become a very large non-profit organization partially funded by the local government and other charitable individuals in the area, and supported largely by supermarkets including a food donation partnership with New Zealand's largest supermarket chain called *Countdown*. Since 2014 when the *Good Samaritan Clause* was passed within the Food Act, the majority of Kaibosh's donors have been commercial supermarkets and the majority of food donated is fresh produce, meat, dairy and bread, which demonstrates the growth of the organization from when it started collecting exclusively baked goods and ready-meals from cafes in 2008.

Today, Kaibosh has roughly 10 staff members, over 200 volunteers, collects food from approximately 40 donors and supports roughly 80 charities. These staff positions include a general manager, three operations managers, two volunteer managers, a marketing and fundraising manager, an administrative assistant, and food rescue truck drivers. The main Kaibosh headquarters is located in the central business district (CBD) of Wellington, with a second smaller location in Lower Hutt which opened in 2016. The newest (and third) Kaibosh branch opened in Kāpiti-Horowheua in February 2020. On Kaibosh's official website they describe their mission "to be the link between the food industry and those that support people in need" and they encourage their staff and volunteers to be "courageous, compassionate, smart, genuine, and independent" (Kaibosh 2019).

The largest food donor at Kaibosh, *Countdown*, was originally a New Zealand based supermarket which first opened in Christchurch but was later bought by *Woolworth's* supermarket which is an Australian company.ⁱⁱⁱ *Countdown* is New Zealand's largest supermarket chain. Kaibosh was the first food rescue organization in New Zealand and once *Countdown* signed on with them, *Countdown New Zealand* wrote it into their policies to donate

any surplus food to any food rescue initiative in their respective region. There are now multiple food rescue organizations across New Zealand, all of which collect food from *Countdown* supermarkets (among other shops). According to Gordon, a Kaibosh food rescue truck driver, it is beneficial for *Countdown* to be seen as part of an initiative such as food rescue because it is good for their image in the community. As much as they might care about their surplus food going to people in need, it is a mutually beneficial relationship for them to be partnered with organizations such as Kaibosh so they are viewed as a charitable and environmentally conscious business.

Kaibosh costs approximately \$550,000 NZD per year to run, so this non-profit is highly reliant on grants from institutions such as the *Wellington City Council*, *Wellington Charitable Trust* and *Hutt Mana Charitable Trust* (among many others) to keep its doors open and the free food flowing. Mark, the general manager, reported spending roughly 60% of his time sourcing funds while Caitlyn, the Marketing Manager, spends a great deal of time creating an online presence for Kaibosh with Facebook and Instagram accounts. These online avenues seem to be very valuable as they allow the organization to showcase to citizens active on social media what it is they do at Kaibosh, posting photos of collected food, smiling staff and volunteers, as well as the occasional story from a charity that Kaibosh supports. For example, Caitlyn shared an interview on the Kaibosh social media accounts that had been conducted with an individual (and the charity with which they were affiliated) about how receiving this food helped them get off the streets. The same day the story was posted on Kaibosh Facebook and Instagram accounts, Caitlyn reported they had e-mails for six new inquires to sign up as donors.

Kaibosh receives a great deal of funding from *The Wellington City Council's* (WCC) *Food Sustainability Department*. The main objective of this department's sector is to provide

funding for community projects in Wellington that practice sustainable food values. Two main initiatives they fund are *Kaibosh* and *Wesley Community Action* (which includes the “Wellington Region Fruit and Vegetable Co-op”). They also fund 20 to 30 smaller community centre type groups who are doing all different things including but not limited to: food rescue; cooking classes; and community gardens. The main role of WCC for addressing food security in Wellington is centered around: 1) funding programs; and 2) changing policy. Policy in this sense is very broad, however, there are three main groups: 1) Land use (e.g. create more farmers’ markets and grocery store access in communities); 2) Use of government funds; and 3) Food purchasing (e.g. policy stating 10% of food sold in store needs to be regional). According to Becky who is the Sustainable Food Systems Lead of the Food Sustainability Department for the WCC, food security is one of many parts in the food sustainability model. Other aspects of creating sustainable food systems include economical, entrepreneurial, and environmental benefits.

4.2 Food Rescue Process: How Does it Work?

There are both registered donors and registered charities that work with Kaibosh. Registered donors include mainly supermarkets, along with a few cafes. These donors have a written agreement with Kaibosh to set food aside that they are unable to sell and would otherwise throw away. These foods include but are not limited to: items getting close to their expiration date or use by date; items that have been mislabeled; items such as fruit or vegetables that are naturally mis-shaped or have minor imperfections; items that are very ripe and need to be consumed very soon before they are unfit for human consumption; and items with damaged packaging. An example of packaging-related ‘waste’ food I saw quite frequently was six-pack of

yogurts (or similar) with one or more missing or detached units. Even though the yogurt itself is still good, it needs to be sold as a “six-pack” which means none of them can be sold and it therefor ends up in the waste bin. To ensure this food *does not* reach the waste bin, a Kaibosh staff member who is employed as a driver visits 10-18 shops (depending on the day of the week) to pick up food Monday to Friday, and the farmers’ markets on Saturdays and Sundays. This means Kaibosh operations are carried out seven days a week, almost 365 days a year.

Once the food is collected from the shops, it is brought back to Kaibosh headquarters and the boxes are stored in the fridge or on the dry shelves accordingly until the volunteer food sorters arrive for their food sorting shift that evening. The food sorters weigh and document each box of food that they put together for each charity, as well as weigh the foods that are put into the compost after food sorting is finished. Kaibosh is committed to operating as sustainably and environmentally friendly as possible. This means they sort the discarded foods into multiple bins in the following order: food waste for farm animals, compost, and lastly garbage. They recycle all bottles, cans and plastics that are associated with sorting food waste. Kaibosh also uses electric vans to collect food from their donors, which reduces their greenhouse gas emissions. These (two) electric vans were donated to their organization in January 2019. The food rescue truck drivers keep a log of all miles driven each day and how much energy it took for the van to do so. This information is kept so Kaibosh can track their emissions saved and renewable energy used as part of their annual report. The volunteers go through all food items that were collected earlier that day by these trucks, which normally takes one to two hours to sort through depending on the day. Kaibosh strives for a 24 hour turn around between when the food is collected from the shop, and when it is re-distributed to the charities. In the words of the operations manager, Andy: “we don't want any food at Kaibosh. We want it to be out in the community.”

Kaibosh keeps a detailed list of which charities get which types of food in addition to weighing and logging into the system each food box they put together. For example, *WELFed* is a non-profit that offers free cooking classes, so they can use items such as bags of flour and sugar, eggs, raw vegetables, etc. The *Wellington Night Shelter* on the other hand uses “ready-meals” such as pre-made sandwiches, pastas, pies etc. because they are offering food to people as they come in for the night or handing it out to people on the street. Kaibosh has found this process to result in the least amount of food wasted as they ensure to the best of their ability that each food box is tailored to the individual needs of the different charities.

Kaibosh provides food parcels consistently to approximately 80 charities each week, along with some other charities that do not pick up food as regularly. Kaibosh partner charities each have a designated day that they arrive at Kaibosh to pick up their food parcels between 9:00 a.m. and 11:30 a.m. Most of the charities arrive before the doors open at 9:00 a.m. or shortly thereafter, resulting in a flurry of activity between 9:00 and 9:20 before the food boxes are packed up in their cars and on their way to their charities and their recipients. The Kaibosh operations manager, Andy, proved to be very organized, friendly and professional while quickly handing out food parcels to receiving charities. Some representatives from these charities were very reserved, simply saying a quiet “thank-you” upon leaving, while others were quite chatty, sharing with Andy that the food they received last week from Kaibosh was “a great hit with the clients!” The interesting (or precarious) part about charities receiving these food boxes is that they never know exactly what they will get. Certain charities will be on lists for baked goods, raw vegetables, fresh fruits, etc. However, some weeks some charities could end up with loaves of multi-grain bread, and others a package of white bread rolls and a chocolate pound cake- as I observed through my volunteer shifts as a food sorter. Some personnel from recipient charities as

well as individual recipients specifically mentioned this aspect of food rescue to me. For example, the coordinators at *WELLfed* said they enjoyed being creative in coming up with recipes each week based on the different ingredients they received from Kaibosh. Madelyn, an individual recipient, expressed her excitement at having the chance to let her children taste new foods that they normally would not get to eat. She gave me an example of giving her kids pomegranate (from Kaibosh) for the first time, saying these are kids who “never even popped popcorn before [...] and now their little mouths will get to taste these foods.” In contrast, Laura, a recipient from the *Strathmore Community Centre* said the amount of food she brings home each Monday is dependent on what the Centre receives from Kaibosh. She said if there is food in her parcel that she knows she does not like, she will give it to someone else because she does not want the food to go to waste.

With that said, from what I learned there was normally enough food to go around. However, Liam, the Kaibosh general manager at the Lower Hutt location, reported not having enough food to take on *new* charities who want to apply to become recipients. If Lower Hutt experiences a shortage for *existing* charities they support, the Wellington City location will try to re-locate some of their collected food to the smaller Lower Hutt location. Even though the Lower Hutt branch is smaller than that of the Wellington City branch, they continue to “punch above their weight” as Liam proudly put it when he spoke about how much food they are able to collect, sort, and redistribute each day.

I gained a great deal of insight on just how much food supermarkets throw away *every day* through my observations in seeing these piles of food first-hand. Kaibosh is not a “free supermarket” for charities, nor do they wish to be treated like one. However, they collect so much food each day that each of their charities are provided with an amount of food that the

charities themselves claim to be “enough”, as reflected in annual feedback reports monitored by Kaibosh. In their 2018/2019 Annual Review, Kaibosh reported rescuing and redistributing 294,712 kg of food which translated to approximately 842,034 meals (based on a 350-gram meal).^{iv} Of the food collected, 43% was fresh produce, 9% was bread, 18% was dairy and 9% was meat (Kaibosh 2019). Some days there is more food than can be claimed, for example extra boxes of French bread sticks, in which case this surplus food is often brought to one of the universities in the city to be given out to students at the student union building.

The movement of all of this rescued food would not be possible without the friendly staff and great relationships Kaibosh maintains with its donor charities. Throughout my fieldwork, I obtained an inside look at how they keep things running so smoothly. My first insights came from Gordon who is a driver for Kaibosh and works Monday to Thursday each week. I could tell that Gordon had the perfect personality for the job since the first day I joined him on the food rescue truck along with Jamie, the food rescue volunteer that day. “This is the only job I've ever had where I feel like I can be myself” is what Gordon told Andy (Kaibosh’s operations manager) after he had been with Kaibosh for over a year. Andy told me this one morning while we were working together and were discussing the differences between each role at Kaibosh and why each person who fills that role has the specific personality and interests to be successful at it. Andy went on to explain that “when somebody feels like they have that trust that they can actually be themselves and express themselves, that's how you get the best out of somebody.” Through working with Gordon, I obtained an inside look at how relationships are maintained between Kaibosh and their donors to facilitate a trustworthy and productive bond which was reinforced through Gordon’s daily interactions with individuals who worked for Kaibosh’s food

donors. Trust was a prominent theme when speaking with each member of the Kaibosh staff.

When on the topic of trust and choosing the right person for the job, Andy put it this way:

“Kaibosh is run on the goodwill of the community basically, so if we break trust or if we abuse the food which is donated to us... trust is something which... takes a long time to build but it can be lost very quickly. So, we choose the people that work for us very carefully. Based on their ability to communicate and to work hard and to- they must have a high level of empathy as well because if you don't care about what you're doing, it's going to come through in your job and that in turn will come through with how you deal with our donors.”

Gordon is very outgoing and cheerful and was often singing in the van or telling me a funny story while we were on our way to make food pick-ups at the supermarkets. For each shop that we visited, Gordon knew most individual employees we came into contact with by name, he always greeted everyone, and was very happy and showed his appreciation for their food donations with many thanks. Over the weeks I got to know Gordon, he talked extensively about the importance of maintaining positive relationships between Kaibosh staff and employees of their donors in order to create ongoing advantageous relationships. According to Gordon, if these individual supermarket employees do not feel respected and appreciated by Kaibosh staff, they could easily not put as much effort into setting aside as much food as they currently do for Kaibosh (Liam, the operations manager for the Lower Hutt location, echoed this same sentiment while I was working with him as well). Gordon explained that this could be because sometimes supermarket staff may find it easier to throw their surplus food in the compost instead of sorting it for what is salvageable (for Kaibosh), so if they do not have a positive experience with Kaibosh staff, they could be less likely to do their part. One way Gordon showed his appreciation for staff of Kaibosh donors would be to occasionally bring small food gifts into the staff such as chocolate: “do you think the ladies would like some chocolate? I think they would,” he would say before we entered the store. He explained this was a small gesture to demonstrate to the staff

that Kaibosh appreciates them, and the staff receiving the chocolate were always very happy for it.

In terms of respect, Gordon spoke several times to me about how “the invitation is critical”, by which he explained that for one’s presence to be welcome, one must first be invited. He compared it to being invited to a party, saying that when someone is invited to a party, they know they are welcome there, as opposed to showing up without an invitation which can cause the host of the party to feel uncomfortable. Gordon said that Kaibosh does a good job of not pushing their organization onto communities that did not ask for it and said it works best when Kaibosh lets people come to them. For example, Kāpiti-Horowheua is a town 90km north of Wellington City from which someone contacted Mark (Kaibosh’s general manager) to ask if Kaibosh could open a location in their city. Mark obliged and after over a year and a half of work on his end setting up new donors and charities in that area and securing enough funding to be able to open a new headquarters, Kaibosh officially opened this new location in February 2020. As Gordon explained, if Kaibosh Wellington had gone into Kāpiti-Horowheua and forced the opening of a new Kaibosh headquarters in a location where no one asked for it, it would not be as successful. Gordon believes following these informal protocols creates relationships built on respect, something that Kaibosh takes very seriously.

Through working with Kaibosh on a regular basis, I saw that two things were happening here: one aspect was on the material level in that this rescued food was brought back to life- so to speak- and was now able to feed many people; another thing happening were the relationships built on respect and trust which facilitated the smooth movement of the rescued food. The examples of relationships above are not *created* by food, but they transpire to create different paths for which the rescued food can smoothly flow from one destination to the next. These

relationships for purpose of facilitation can be seen as social factors that have an important part to play in the complex biography of rescued food as it moves and comes into contact with different actors throughout its journey.

4.3 Kaibosh Partner Charities: Where Does the Food Go?

To become a registered charity with Kaibosh and receive food parcels, in their Kaibosh application the charity must prove that: 1) Their charity is registered with the government; and 2) Their charity provides some other form of social assistance (e.g. budgeting advice, career counselling, parenting courses, etc.). Kaibosh supports roughly 80 charities. Among them all, these charities offer a range of services from school breakfast programs, to women's shelters, to mental health teams and many services in between. As previously mentioned, different charities use different types of food for different reasons. I visited five of the charities that Kaibosh supports and observed first-hand where exactly the rescued food was going, how it was used, and what it facilitated on different levels.

The *Boys & Girls Institute* (BGI) is a charity that Kaibosh supports which offers an array of assistance for clients including youth cooking classes, parenting classes and youth mentoring. For example, on Mondays, Jane, a food recipient who volunteers with BGI, and Karen, one of the BGI program coordinators, use food from Kaibosh to lead programs with high school students, teaching them how to cook for themselves. Jane also explained that for the last three years, Kaibosh has given extra food to BGI for Jane to bring to her flat in Newtown to distribute among the residents of the building. Newtown is the same part of town where the *Wellington City Mission* (WCM) is located. Some other food recipients include those who live in the Dixon

Street Flats, a subsidized housing building across the street from BGI. Some residents of this building told me they cook with the food they receive from BGI. Several people said receiving this food takes some of the pressure off (both financially and mentally) and puts their mind at ease to know they will have a bag of food coming into their home each Thursday for free. One man told me that receiving food here “makes a big difference” because food is very expensive in New Zealand now, giving the example that a 2kg bag of potatoes costs \$7 at the supermarket. Another man told me he is unable to cook due to the severity of his Parkinson’s, so he does not take home any raw foods to cook, and instead will take foods that are ready to eat without cooking (if available), as well as regularly eat at one of the soup kitchens in town because their meals are ready to eat upon arrival.

The *Wellington City Mission* in Newtown uses food they receive from Kaibosh to cook free lunches four days a week from Monday to Thursday for those in need.^v Anyone is welcome for these free lunches. Amy, the Mission’s food bank coordinator, explained to me how their food bank works at the *Wellington City Mission* regarding food parcels for clients to take home. Anyone is able to sign up, however, they do need to provide some details such as if they will be receiving food for themselves, a couple or a family. To receive food from the food bank, individuals also need to register for another service such as financial advisory or job seeking services. The way the food bank is currently run at WCM is that individuals or families come in and pick up a pre-packed food parcel from whatever has been donated (from Kaibosh and other donors in the city). Most of these items are canned and dried goods because they are stored on shelving units without refrigeration and are there for days or weeks depending on the need.

WELLfed is a non-profit which offers free cooking classes for people living in the Porirua area (about 30km Northwest of Wellington City). Kaibosh provides *WELLfed* with several boxes

of food per week, and the recipes each week are dependent on whatever they receive from Kaibosh. *WELLfed* began when two local women started hearing other mothers at their children's school expressing their desire to learn how to cook. While these two women had no previous professional experience in cooking or teaching, they did have a keen interest in home cooking, and thus started hosting basic cooking classes for other women who were interested. In 2016 they held their first class at one of the elementary schools in the area, and then at three different schools, and then in 2018 *WELLfed* moved into an old Bowls Club, the facility where they now hold all of their classes (three times per week). The initiative has funding from the *Wellington City Council* and receives food from Kaibosh, along with other individual donations from community members. They accept donations of cookware and utensils which enables them to offer each new person signing up for classes to bring home a set of cookware including items such as a pot, a pan, a spatula, a large mixing bowl, etc. Each new person signing up for classes is permitted to attend class once a week for one year. After that they graduate from the program, they are able to help out as a volunteer to monitor or teach the classes if they wish. The majority of those attending classes appeared to be in their late 20s to late 40s. *WELLfed* also provides their students with the recipes they use each week (which are all dietitian approved), food budgeting advice consisting of strategies such as how to shop in-season for fruit and vegetables, and how to use each part of your produce such as making soup broth from vegetable peelings.

I met Dianne, the director for the *Linden Social Centre* at Kaibosh one morning during the time that charities were coming in to pick up their food boxes. She was there to pick up her weekly food parcels for the community centre in Linden which is located roughly 20km North of Wellington City. The Centre hosts a free lunch- called *The Kai Kitchen Initiative*- for people in the Linden area each Friday. Dianne initially told me it is for “the homeless”, to which she

followed up by saying that Linden does not exactly have people living on the streets, but there are people “living rough” in subsidized housing. She also said they do not monitor who comes in for meals and they welcome whoever shows up from the area. There is also a fridge in the centre that is open each day and stocked with food items donated both by Kaibosh and Linden community members, that any resident is able to access, “no questions asked.”

Dianne is the only employed person at *Linden Social Centre*, which is a position that was initiated in June 2019^{vi} and is funded by the *Wellington City Council*. The rest of those who help facilitate the free lunches are all volunteers. Three Fridays a month the lunches are run by volunteers who set up the room (tables and chairs), cook, serve food, and clean. The last Friday of each month is run by local businesses that sign up to sponsor the free lunch. This means the business is then in charge of everything (buying food, set up, cooking, cleaning, etc.). Dianne said there is a good dose of “healthy competition” among the businesses who put on the lunch each month to “out-do” the previous business. She said the community members in need benefit from this because the businesses offer more and more food and goods each month. The lunch I attended was put on by a local business and in addition to the lunch, there was free used clothing, books, and children’s toys available for anyone to take home at the end of the meal.

Apart from the lunch on Fridays, Dianne also facilitates the pick-up and redistribution of a variety of goods within the area. This includes but is not limited to: food; books; clothing; housewares; and children’s toys. Dianne is very sociable and out-going and tries to get her name out in the community as much as possible so that she may link-up schools and people in the area who need help with the goods and services. In addition to the food Dianne picks-up from Kaibosh, she also visits a local (in Linden) grocer to pick up surplus breads and milk. She works a lot with the kindergarten and elementary schools in the area, dropping off food for parents to

take home as they pick up their kids at the end of the day. Dianne brings these foods wherever she hears they are needed. For example, as I conducted a follow-along with her one morning, we brought food to one kindergarten, food and books to another, and also picked up surplus food at one elementary school to bring to another. As this redistribution position had only been operating for two months at the time of my visit, there were still kinks in the system. Throughout the morning Dianne navigated conversations with school staff members to discuss the most productive and efficient way to accomplish the pick-up and redistribution of food.

The *Strathmore Community Centre* offers Strathmore residents an array of social services and social community events. The Centre gives the food from Kaibosh to Strathmore community residents each Monday. Starting around 9:30 a.m., residents gather in the living room of the community centre where there is tea, coffee, and some breakfast fruits available. They sign their name on the list and include whether they are “single” or a “family.” They used to let residents chose a certain number of items from the table of food all at once, but they found this was creating conflict among the residents competing for certain desirable items. Now, the staff of the community centre divide up the food depending on how many people are in attendance on the given day. They try to make it as even as possible. They then call residents over to pick up their food parcel one by one. With the new strategy of dividing each parcel up first, once the residents each have their own bag they are able to swap items among themselves if they wish. Heidi, one of the coordinators, said that this strategy has been working much better for them; the residents seem content and there are no longer arguments over food items.

Though these charities do operate separately- offering different services and obtaining different funding- I did discover a level of collaboration between some of them which appeared to help in the facilitation of charitable social service programs on a larger scale across

Wellington city. At the *Boys & Girls Institute*, Karen, one of the institute's coordinators, introduced me to George, one of the people responsible for linking BGI with the Dixon Street Flats two years ago. George told me that “we can't house everyone, but we can feed everyone that comes into our city [...] Wellington has the name of a city, it looks like a town, and feels like a village.” Although George did not specifically mention “collaboration”, I got a sense that Wellington may take pride in leaning towards a collaborative approach to address issues of hunger in their city. This collaborative spirit resonates with what Becky from the *Wellington City Council* of the Food Sustainability Department described when expressing her opinion and appreciation for the “closeness of the community in Wellington.” She explained that Wellington is a small city and “the feeling of community is really there.” Akin to this sentiment, Karen had also explained to me in a separate conversation that there has been a shift in sharing resources between charity groups lately. She said prior to this, each charity was competing for funds, and although this still takes place, they are slowly realizing things work better if they share extra resources. So, they share resources and food: if one charity has a surplus of an item such as milk or loaves of bread, they share it with another charity, creating reciprocal relationships. She said she is not exactly sure why or what initiated this change but is happy the shift occurred because it has been working well.

In addition to this, Amy from the *Wellington City Mission* also reported that within the last year, different organizations in Wellington started to become more connected through communication and sharing resources; something that they had never previously done. She could not put her finger on what caused this change and chalked it up to individuals at these charities realizing that “things work better when we work together.” Amy also informed me about the *Food Bank Coalition* which was a national initiative that used to be active in the past, however,

had started again in 2018 after several years of being inactive. She said that for the coalition, food banks in the region meet quarterly to discuss the issues they are facing and what is working and not working. Amy described this as a collaborative approach where ideas are shared between food bank organizations. Therefore, while each charity is an independent organization and must obtain funds separately (often from the same pool of funding from the *Wellington City Council*), according to coordinators at both BGI and WCM, this has changed within the last year or two.^{vii} While before different charities in the city did not keep in contact with one another at all, now, organizations function through relationships of reciprocity through sharing food and ideas resulting in a type of collaboration within competition.

4.4 Individual Food Recipients: Perspectives and Strategies

All food recipients I interviewed were approximately 35- 55 years of age, with different levels of education ranging from high school diplomas to degrees in sociology and social work. The majority of food recipient interviewees were unemployed for various reasons and for different lengths of time. Four of the recipients I interviewed were European (white) New Zealanders, and two of my interviewees had a parent who was an immigrant from the South Pacific: Faith who had a parent from Samoa; and Derek who had a parent from Fiji. Jane is a single mother who receives food from the *Boys & Girls Institute* each Monday. Jane is roughly 40 years of age and lives with her two sons (ages 5 and 12) in an apartment in Newtown. Jane who has a certificate in childhood education does not work full-time but is employed on an on-call basis as an early-childhood educator taking care of children. She said it is hard to work during the day because her youngest son needs to be picked up from school. I asked Jane if things became noticeably more difficult after she and her partner split up four years ago, in terms

of food or otherwise. Jane struggled to put into words how she felt, in the end saying that she feels as though she is much better at coping and managing on her own now. She said she has a lot of support from social programming through BGI, *Birthright* (a program designed to help single parents), and the *Wellington Women's Refuge*.

Now, Jane volunteers at BGI once a week on Monday afternoons and explained that instead of getting paid, she gets food which comes from Kaibosh. However, there are others at BGI who receive Kaibosh food without volunteering, so volunteering is not a prerequisite to receiving food parcels. In Jane's case, volunteering seemed to be along the lines of giving thanks to BGI. She said receiving food at BGI is a huge help because it is usually meats and fresh produce, and as she has two sons at home, receiving this food ensures her children will have food each week. Jane said if she receives food items with which she is unfamiliar or does not know how to prepare, Karen will give her a recipe to follow. Jane expressed being very happy with her arrangement with BGI. She reported not using any other food charity but did explain that through the Working Income Benefit with the New Zealand Government, applicants can receive up to three food parcels per year. However, she said to apply for this benefit, applicants need to explain their situation which can be embarrassing at times. She said this would be for a real emergency as applicants can only receive a food parcel three times per calendar year. In contrast, Jane explains that working with BGI to be very warm and welcoming. She explained the first service she used with BGI was the mentoring program for her elder son, in which she *did* have to fill out paperwork about her situation. However, I got the sense that Jane did not have the same feelings of embarrassment at BGI as she did when contemplating applying for the Working Income Benefit.

In another case, Laura receives a food parcel from the *Strathmore Community Centre* each Monday. Laura is roughly 40 years of age, single with no children and lives with one roommate in Strathmore, Wellington. She completed high school and has multiple certificates in different specialties of which she was quite vague. Laura is unemployed but is currently looking for work. As mentioned earlier, the amount of food Laura takes home each week is dependent on what the Centre receives from Kaibosh. She said she does not like to waste food so if there are items in her parcel she knows she will not eat, she does not take them so that someone else can have them. Laura said depending on how things are going with her bills, she might also pick up a food parcel from *Saint Aiden's Church* in Miramar which is roughly 1.7 km from the *Strathmore Community Centre*. She said residents are allowed to pick up one food parcel per calendar month from the church and must provide ID proving their identity as a Strathmore or Miramar resident. Laura stressed she only receives food from the church in cases of emergency and would not go there "just for the heck of it." She expressed concern that if residents abuse these food aid programs, those coordinating the programs might start to think that these residents do not really need the food, and the food aid could cease to exist. Laura said if she had a job she would not need to receive food from the community centre because she would have more money to buy her own groceries.

Derek also receives a food parcel from the *Strathmore Community Centre* each Monday. During the 2008 market crash, Derek had been working as a legal editor for LexisNexis, an American information and research company for which he had had professional training. He had lost his job due to the crash and has been on and off employment over the last decade. Most recently he was working as a care worker at a senior citizen facility, but he has been unemployed for the last year due to health reasons. He is roughly 50 years of age, lives alone and is not in

contact with family members. Derek reports that the food he receives each week is never enough because it is food that needs to be consumed within one or two days due to the expiry dates and the condition of the produce. He makes a soup each week that will last him three days, but says he prefers to eat meat instead; something he does not receive much of at the Centre. He said his standards for food went up after he was working last year, and I got the sense that now that he is unemployed he is finding it difficult to adjust to this type of food aid (i.e. rescued food that might need to be consumed quickly, or not getting to choose which foods you take home). When describing his dislike for his current situation regarding food, he said “it’s not all bad news [...] I’ve had my chance to get my face in the trough [while working]. Get decent food. But not recently.”

Mary also receives a food parcel from *Strathmore Community Centre* on Mondays. She moved from Auckland to Wellington in June 2019 (roughly two months prior to our meeting). Mary has a degree in Sociology and is currently unemployed, roughly 55 years of age, single, lives alone and has no family in Wellington. Mary said the food she receives each Monday is enough for her because she likes vegetables and rarely eats meat. Contrary to Derek’s thoughts on the food available at the *Strathmore Community Centre*, Mary said “the food is perfect” that she receives. She said on occasion that she does also go to the *Downtown Community Ministry* (DCM) which is a facility that “work[s] with people to find and sustain housing, access a benefit and manage their money, and to connect to whānau [extended family], health and other services and supports” (DCM 2019). DCM offers free lunches to city residents who may be homeless or living rough. Mary said she goes to DCM “if need be” as a back-up option if she has absolutely no food. The last time she went to DCM was two weeks prior to when I spoke with her. Mary also described she used a similar service when she was living and working in the CBD of

Auckland the year before. She said on certain days the churches would “flood the downtown” serving free lunches. She said the *Auckland City Mission* would serve a three-course meal. Mary recounts the lines were always very long and commented that “[...] the majority of them [people in the food lineup], have properties [not homeless] and live in the CBD. Obviously they're too lazy to prepare their own meals but because it's readily available...[they line up for free food].”

Faith attends free cooking classes at *WELFed* each Tuesday. Faith is a single mother of seven children, five of whom still live at home. Faith finished a college degree, took a break, and then went on to earn a degree in social work. She is roughly 35 years of age, is the single provider for her children, and currently unemployed. Her youngest child is now four years of age and so Faith said she would like to start looking for work soon. She has been attending *WELFed* cooking classes for almost a year which means she will soon be ‘graduated’ from the student cooking program. At the end of the class she (and the rest of the students) bring home a bag of food which are the remaining items that were not used for the day’s recipe. She said the food she receives from *WELFed* each week is not enough to feed her family of six living at home, but that it certainly does help to alleviate some financial pressure. Faith said one of the most helpful things she has learned while participating in this initiative is budgeting advice and how to stretch her dollar as far as possible, while still buying healthy foods for her family. Faith said before *WELFed*, she used to buy a lot of takeout food for her family, but now that she has learned some cooking skills they eat mainly home cooked meals which has both saved her money and is healthier. She said she is learning that healthy foods are good not only for your body but for your brain as well.

Madelyn used to attend free cooking classes at *WELFed*, and after one year she graduated to become a volunteer to help instruct the cooking classes. She is single, roughly 40

years of age and is the sole provider for her five children who are ages 2 to 20. Madelyn explained that social workers are able to refer clients to *WELLfed*, although she heard about the initiative through her daughter's school newsletter. She said that before joining *WELLfed*, she was in poverty. She explained that at *WELLfed* she learned cooking skills, recipes, budgeting, how to shop in season for foods, and it has saved her enough money to spread even further and she now claims she was able to come out of poverty. Madelyn said she likes the idea of food rescue because her children get to taste foods such as pomegranate, feta cheese or salmon; foods they otherwise would never have the opportunity to try. She also said that now social workers are calling her asking for a firsthand perspective of how *WELLfed* operates and how it worked for her. Madelyn is now halfway through a culinary degree at Polytech University, although said it has been hard finding the time to finish her degree with having five children. She hopes to open a food truck with her eldest son- who has a keen interest for food- after she graduates.

Mark (Kaibosh's general manager) said it well when he explained that "we [at Kaibosh] say food is just one of the tools in those organizations' toolbox to... socially empower people for an empowered society, and we can't do all the other stuff [social service programs] but we can provide one of the tools for them." Mark is not naïve to think that giving food to people in need is going to solve all of their food insecurity problems. However, he is able to see the larger picture in that food is one part of this puzzle in getting people who are struggling the help they need to succeed. Dianne from the *Linden Social Centre* maintains a complementary view to Mark's. I asked her if she believes redistributing food is helping people to create real change in their lives, so they may eventually support themselves. Dianne explained that we need to address the basic need of hunger first if people are to have a chance at making any other change in their lives. According to Dianne, once people are no longer hungry, they will engage with social

services and work on bettering their situation (such as finding a job, etc.). A very similar view to this was found when I spoke with Becky from the *Wellington City Council* about long-term versus short-term change. She explained that food is one part of keeping people going so they can lift themselves up to be able to support themselves to eventually be able to buy their own food. Both Becky and the council for the Food Sustainability Department as a whole, recognize that giving people food for free is not a long-term solution, but that it keeps people fed while they work on their own personal cases through social services and skill building, as we have seen with the cases presented above.

While the food we have followed in this chapter is no longer a commodity in the market exchange system and is instead operating outside of the market and not being exchanged for anything- essentially entering the gift economy- we can see that it has value to the people receiving it. This rescued food can be seen as a “terminal commodity” (Appadurai 1986) because it has completed its original duty as a commodity for sale. It is not flowing in and out of a commodity state even though it may exchange hands after it is rescued from the supermarket, because at that point it is part of the gift economy rather than being exchanged for other goods or services. For example, as with Jane who volunteers at BGI, she would receive food parcels from BGI whether she volunteered for them or not; because she is a client of theirs through social programming. Jane volunteers as a way to show her appreciation to BGI for the help they give her and because she enjoys the atmosphere there. None of the rescued food given to charities by Kaibosh is given with any intention of receiving anything other than respect. As this rescued food enters the gift realm, it does so but not in a Maussian (1925) sense. There is not a relationship of reciprocity operating between charities and individual recipients within this food system of rescued food. There may be a level of reciprocity between charities, but this is a

relatively new development in Wellington and not one that I gained much insight on. Kaibosh makes explicit promises to their donors that they will responsibly distribute the food and not use it for exchange purposes. This means Kaibosh agrees that the food is no longer a commodity and they have a legal (signed agreement) responsibility to keep it that way while under their possession. Recipient charities then distribute the food as they see fit. At Kaibosh, I got the sense that the staff saw the value of the rescued food as mainly nutritional and that the full possibilities of other value(s) the food may possess were not as prominent. The volunteer manager of the Wellington city site, Brandon, expressed to me that he would eventually like to be able to track the social impacts of Kaibosh in their annual reports collected from charities, but admitted this is much harder to measure than kilograms of food.

Through my study on Kaibosh I learned that it takes many people to pull off their everyday operations. They collect and redistribute mass amounts of food each week, and tailor the food parcels they put together to specific charities. Following the journey of ‘food waste’ allowed me to get to know the people involved in this food aid initiative spanning multiple levels, as well as what this food (and Kaibosh initiative) meant to charities and individual recipients. As the stories of the recipients discussed in this chapter show, the rescued food absolutely did hold nutritional value. People were hungry and needed help to feed themselves and their children. However, as anthropologists have long noted, and as we shall see in the next chapter, it is possible for food to demonstrate multiple values and meanings (simultaneously), including those outside of nutrition.

Chapter 5: Beyond the Food: The Social Life of Rescued Food

I visited the Dixon Street Flats on a Thursday morning with Karen, one of the coordinators of the Boys & Girls Institute. This meant the food the residents were receiving was food that had been collected by Kaibosh the previous day from the supermarkets. As it happened, I had been out with Gordon that previous day collecting food which meant I had helped to collect the food that was being distributed on the day of my visit to BGI. When Karen showed me the bowls and boxes of food the residents were going to be taking home that day, I felt more emotional than I had expected. I had seen the food waste cycle come full circle and now here I was, in this room full of residents, many of whom previously had no social life (as I will explain below) but were now conversing and laughing with one another over tea and coffee, waiting to take home their boxes of fresh produce for the week. It was in this moment that I truly realized that food could create and exhibit so much more than simply nutritional values.

As we saw in chapter four, the journey of much food waste in Wellington begins with Kaibosh. The moment food loses its commodity status in retail stores thus becoming a non-commodity, is when supermarkets and cafes first consider it as ‘food waste’ which is where Kaibosh intercedes. Nonetheless, we have seen that food that is considered ‘waste’ by many can be reclaimed and continue to have great nutritional value to support individuals through the charities of which they are a part. However, as I was conducting my fieldwork, I realized there was much more going on than solely feeding people in need. It became apparent that the impacts went beyond the materiality of food, and that this rescued food exhibited and created other forms of value such as sociability, social spaces, empowerment, education and skill building, all of which were facilitated through the presence of food.

These types of social aspects and skills that food facilitates are shown to positively impact the quality of life for individuals as Boreham et al. (2013, 152-53) note. Policy makers often tend to advocate for increasing economic security in response to improving social well-being for people, however, there is social science research that takes a more multi-dimensional approach to support other avenues for improving one’s social well-being outside of raising

economic security. Health, social relationships, emotional well-being, community connectedness, and educational attainments among others are all considered to have a strong influence on an individual's quality of life and well-being. Drawing on Sen, Boreham et al. explain that social well-being may be dependant on what resources individuals have access to, as well as their ability to transform these resources into social well-being. This has sparked a dialogue in which researchers are concerned with looking beyond the scope of income to consider other factors within one's life experiences. Income is undoubtedly important to well-being as it enables us to be able to afford basic needs such as food, clothing and housing. As such, it is true that we cannot ignore the fact that income in one form or another is of extreme importance for humans worldwide. Though, as Costanza et al. (2016, 352-53) highlight in their discussion on *Modelling and Measuring Sustainable Wellbeing in Connection with the UN Sustainable Development Goals*: "It is clear that increases in material standards make a very major difference to well-being in poorer countries where many people lack basic necessities, yet as countries get richer, further increases in material standards make less and less difference to well-being. In richer countries social capital and community may be the limiting factor." This means that as economic stability is important, it is not the sole factor in having a healthy social well-being, especially when examining the 'developed' world. Thus, it is worthwhile examining other factors that may go into achieving positive social well-being and quality of life. Constanza et al. advocate for a hybrid approach to measuring well-being among populations. Net economic contribution, natural capital/ecosystem services contribution, and social capital/community contribution should all be considered when measuring well-being according to these authors. I am concerned with the latter- community contribution and involvement- and will discuss this in further detail throughout this chapter.

Social exclusion and access to services is another aspect that Boreham et al. (2013, 154) argue as having an influence on human well-being. They define social exclusion as “the lack or denial of resources, rights, goods and services, and the inability to participate in the normal relationships and activities, available to the majority of people in a society, whether in economic, social, cultural or political arenas.” However, as the authors importantly point out, “economic deprivation does not always imply social exclusion.” Thus, we can surmise that those who might have little economic wealth can still have fulfilling social relationships and participate in activities when available to them. Boreham et al. hypothesize that in the event that individuals do not have access to public services it can hinder their ability to “participate in civic life” resulting in a feedback loop which then effects their ability to use their resources to obtain social well-being. An example of this could be the inability to access a community centre at which one could make friends, thus unable to create social relationships which could help improve one’s social well-being.

In relation to social well-being, food has long been a topic of study for anthropologists. As we know from Pottier’s 1999 *Anthropology of Food: The Social Dynamics of Food Security* and Mintz and DuBois’ 2002 *The Anthropology of Food and Eating* mentioned earlier, there are many other uses for food apart from bodily nourishment. The anthropological literature on food and commensality (eating and drinking together) has often- though not exclusively- focused on rituals and feasts, but in recent years the study of everyday commensality is becoming more prominent (Danesi 2018; Kerner et al. 2015). Danesi (2018, 102) suggests that research on commensality of industrialized countries (the ‘developed’ world) is lacking. Taking a closer look at the everyday eating and sharing habits of humans can provide insight into how we create trust, secure and reinforce relationships, and maintain safe spaces of belonging. Drawing on Simmel’s

work, Kerner et al. (2015, 2) explain that people who seemingly do not have anything in common may still sit down to share a meal together, which transforms the biological need to eat into a social experience.^{viii} However, this is not to mean that commensality is always enjoyable for all as there can be tensions due to implicit inclusion and exclusion of individuals (Kerner et al. 2015, 41). As Danesi (2018, 112) notes: “While this social arrangement fosters the development of social cohesion, it does not prevent conflicts arising between the members of the community”; not everyone sharing a meal together may feel comfortable doing so.

Nonetheless, many social events we attend are centered around food; food brings people together, or as Quandt et al. (2001, 145) say, it is a “social glue.” In their study on *The Social and Nutritional Meaning of Food Sharing Among Older Rural Adults*, Quandt et al. (2001, 155-59) explain that for elders, receiving and giving food aid is reinforcing their sense of “community as an inclusive group in which they share membership.” The authors go on to discuss the ability of food to serve as a *pretext* for social interaction. In Weiss’ (1996) publication on the consumption and commoditization practices of the Haya in Tanzania, he titles the fifth chapter: *A Moral Gastronomy: Value and Action in the Experience of Food*. Here, he writes about the potential food had to mobilize action and thus can be found to have multiple meanings at the same time. It is therefore not only valued for its current abilities, but also for its *potential*. Weiss (1996, 128) explains that “[...] food is meaningful and valuable because it motivates action in a number of ways. It is an object to be pursued both for itself and as a means to the encompassing actions, relations, processes, etc. of which it is a part. [...] Food thereby becomes desired for its own sake as well as its wider potential.”

It is no secret that food brings people together, so what I found in that regard in my study of the Kaibosh Food Rescue program in Wellington should not be overly surprising. However,

the way in which relationships unfolded and transpired- particularly for food recipients- as well as what this rescued food was able to create after its de-commodification is interesting and worth examining closer. To do this, I will examine what *value* the food is creating both directly and indirectly as it comes into contact with different actors and environments. Thus, I will discuss what is possible within the afterlife of rescued food, and the change it can leave in its wake.

5.1 Come for the Food, Stay for the (Social) Interaction

As previously mentioned, the *Boys & Girls Institute* (BGI) gives some of the food they receive from Kaibosh to the Dixon Street Flats (subsidized housing owned by Housing New Zealand) across the road from their institution each week. This apartment complex houses many older residents. BGI first became involved with the apartment two years ago (around 2017) because an issue came to light in which older residents were passing away in their apartments of this complex and not being found until weeks or months later because they were not socializing at all and had no friends or family in the area that would have been checking in with them. BGI decided to start a *Free Café* for building residents which would be held in the common room of the flats each Thursday.^{ix} The idea for the *Free Café* was to give out food parcels (food that BGI received from Kaibosh) to both entice residents to get out of their apartments and socialize, and to help them out with the high costs of food. The room was eventually set up with tea, coffee and baked goods, which would help create a social space for residents to meet with their neighbours each week. This socialization was a way for residents to check-up on each other each week.

The first couple of times the *Free Café* was held, residents came in for the 11:00 a.m. opening, took their food parcel and left. This was not what the coordinators from BGI were

hoping for, so the new plan was to open the doors at 11:00 a.m., offer tea, coffee and baked goods donated by *The Free Store* (discussed below), and then at 12:30 p.m. they would give out the Kaibosh food parcels to whomever was present. BGI staff found that residents would continue to come closer to 11:00 a.m., but now they would have a hot drink and a snack and sit at the tables chatting with other residents of the building until the food parcels were given out. When this program started, this would be the first time some of these residents had spoken to anyone in weeks, and in some cases, months.

When I visited the *Free Café*, as I moved around the room with Karen who was introducing me to people,^x I noticed that residents were very happy to see her.^{xi} While I was speaking with several residents at the *Free Café*, many expressed to me the enjoyment they get from coming to the café each Thursday to talk with their neighbours. Many residents said they do not have many (if any) other friends or family in the area, so this is the only time they socialize with anyone. There were about 30 residents in the room and while not everyone was talking to their neighbours, the majority were sitting at shared tables and conversing with one another.

One of the older gentlemen I met at the café, Ollie, told me he comes for a coffee and to talk with his neighbours every week and that if the *Free Café* stopped operating now, he would “really miss it.” As noted in chapter four, Ollie has Parkinson’s disease and explained that he cannot cook due to the severity of his condition. As most of the items in the food parcels at the *Free Café* are fresh produce; things that would need to be cooked, he is not able to take much of this food home. He obtains hot meals from the soup kitchens in town but uses the *Free Café* as a social space to talk to his neighbours. This illustrates how food can be used as a tool to get people to come together and socialize; a “pretext” (Quandt et al. 2001). For Ollie, it is not the

food per se that keeps him coming back each week, it is the company. In the same breath, the initial reason this company is gathering is because *food is present*. In this instance, we see that the presence of Kaibosh food (that was once categorized as waste) is able to create social relationships, trust and companionship.

I found a similar social atmosphere while visiting the *Strathmore Community Centre*. On the day of my visit to the Centre, I stayed in the living room of the facility for a few hours during the food distribution process and spoke with residents as they waited for their food parcels. The environment seemed welcoming and relaxed. Many people were talking with one another, though some did keep to themselves. Mary, one of the residents I interviewed there, explained to me that even on the weeks she does not need to pick up a food parcel, she still comes to the Centre to have a tea and chat with other community members whom she has gotten to know. She lives alone and said she enjoys the company at the community centre. Thus, the rescued food served as a pretense for residents coming together in a physical space in which they now feel safe and comfortable. Those seeking social interaction, rather than food some weeks, know they can now do so because the (social) space has already been created and facilitated by this rescued food.

Similarly, when I visited the *Linden Social Centre*, Denise, the program coordinator, told me that some people in the community are isolated and the free lunch they offer on Fridays gives them an opportunity to come out and socialize, see the regulars that show up each week, talk to new people and share thoughts and ideas. She said this is a positive interaction between people. It gives them a chance to converse with others and share experiences. While Denise was explaining the premise of the initiative, she put an emphasis on the intension of creating a space where those going through a tough time (whether it is due to financial stress or being new to the

country etc.) can get together over a hot meal and know they are not alone.^{xii} Thus, at the *Linden Social Centre*, she wanted to get strangers talking with one another so they could meet their neighbours.

When I attended this lunch myself, I did get the sense of what she was explaining to be true. As I entered the community room, there were four long rows of tables lined up, and about 60 people in the room for the lunch. By the time I arrived the lunch had started and many people were already sitting down to their meals. I waited in a short line to receive my lunch where volunteers were dishing up a variety of items including white rice, noodles, roast chicken, pumpkin soup, bread rolls, garden salad and coleslaw. There was also an array of desserts offered which included chocolate pudding and chocolate mousse which seemed to make people quite content. I sat down across from Denise and while she was chatting with a neighbour, I spoke with a woman to my right who volunteers at the *Linden Social Centre* for these lunches. As I looked around the room, I saw people talking with one another, some conversations appeared to be slightly solemn while others were laughing and joking around. The room was not very loud and although a couple of people were eating alone, many people were chatting quietly amongst themselves: asking how the kids were; how their mother was doing; and commenting on the quality of the meal. I spoke with a man sitting to my left who had been quietly eating on his own. Once we made eye contact, he turned to me and was quite chatty. He looked to be in his 60s and said he grew up in the area and that he comes to this lunch each week. He told me he normally sees a few friends here but there were not as many people around that day. Earlier, Denise had told me that the centre gets roughly 50 to 100 people for lunch depending on the day. I had never attended a communal meal with strangers such as this before, and it was an enjoyable experience. The volunteers were nice, the room was calm, there was enough space to not feel

congested, and people attending the lunch were able to eat as much or as little as they wanted while they caught up with their neighbours. Through this experience, I could see that rescued food created a space that facilitated new relationships and bonds between neighbours who benefit from social interaction.

I had heard similar sentiments on social interaction while volunteering at *The Free Store* in Wellington City, the organization which donates baked goods to the BGI *Free Café* discussed above. These food donations are not for the food parcels, but rather for residents to gather and eat together at the *Free Café* before they pick up their parcels of produce from BGI. Though not associated directly with Kaibosh, *The Free Store* is a non-profit initiative in Wellington that operates on the same premise as Kaibosh: giving rescued ‘food waste’ new life. Monday to Friday each week, volunteers at *The Free Store* pick up surplus food from cafes in the city centre of Wellington, bring it back to their headquarters, and then organize the food by item type (loaves of bread together, sweet treats such as brownies or cookies, savory items such as scones and pies, etc.). Then, at the end of each day, individuals line up to select items from *The Free Store* for the food parcel they will bring home that day.^{xiii} Depending on how much and what was collected on any given day, the volunteers at *The Free Store* make a daily limit, for example: each person can choose one loaf of bread, one scone, two ready-made meals and one muffin. *The Free Store* differs from Kaibosh because: it collects food from cafes exclusively (i.e. mostly baked goods); it deals directly with the public; and *anyone* is encouraged to come share tea and coffee together as well as pick-up food parcels from *The Free Store*, as the idea first and foremost is to reduce food waste through food rescue. *The Free Store* collects this food from cafes as a result of the bill that Kaibosh passed in Parliament that legally protects food donors.

One day while I was volunteering at *The Free Store* to help give out tea and coffee to those arriving for food parcels, one of the ladies sat down beside me and when I asked her if she would like anything she responded: “No I just wanted to be around people and talk to people.” She said she did not need any food that day and was just there to have a chat with those who were around because she lives by herself and was feeling lonely that day. Anna, the program coordinator for *The Free Store* told me that “The tea is a nice bridge to bring people in while they are waiting for the food [pantry with parcels] to open.” This was interesting because it gave the impression that picking up the food was not enough interaction for some people, and the tea and coffee served beforehand provided the social space they wanted and needed. On this occasion, about 30 to 40 people came in for a hot drink and most of them looked to be in their late 30s to 50s. The majority of them appeared quite disheveled, some possibly homeless while many appeared to belong to marginalized groups. It is worth noting that once the lineup for the food started, many of those in the line up looked to be of university student age (in their 20s), were tidy and relatively well-dressed. None of those who appeared to be of student age had attended the social period beforehand. It may be surmised that those living with fewer resources desire social interaction and are able to obtain that during occasions such as this. This particular day the tea and coffee period was held inside the church (next to *The Free Store*) because it was raining. However, most days it was held outside and from my observations as I volunteered for several shifts, people continue to show up for tea even when it was held outside. Therefore, it would appear that warm shelter is not the main draw of attendance for these tea-goers, and that it could be a mixture of hot drinks, a place to go (routine), and socialization as the main draw. I also learned that while some of these people initially turned up to collect food parcels, they later signed up to become volunteers at *The Free Store* because they enjoyed the atmosphere and

“sense of community.” As with the rescued food distributed by Kaibosh it appears that this rescued food, too, is serving as a “social glue” (Quandt et al. 2001) which facilitates social interaction (Weiss 1996).

These occurrences demonstrate that not only does rescued food have the potential to create relationships, it also has the potential to create a space for individuals to come together. In Danesi’s (2018, 106) fieldwork in France and Spain on commensality patterns of young adults under the age of 25, she observed that “even if some individuals were not really hungry, if they decided they would stay longer with the group, these persons ate with the others.” This demonstrates that those who are not hungry will still arrive to the gathering which implies that eating is not the only activity occurring and it is not only for nourishment but for social purposes as well. Just as Danesi (2018, 113) notes that “food is the pretext for gather[ing] people together,” my research indicates that rescued food not only brings groups of people together, but once a routine is established in a group coming together for food, some may begin showing up for the company and human connections rather than the food. As we have seen thus far, these meetings in social spaces are made possible by the presence of that food. Thus, we see another value of rescued food in its potential to establish social spaces, and in the cases I witnessed, *safe* social spaces.

Boreham et al. (2013, 154-55) argue that there is research from many different fields that supports the claim that “social connections and attendant norms of confidence and reciprocity are important elements in people’s quality of life.” The authors go on to explain that the intensity of the social connections one has are a strong indicator in predicting subjective well-being. Examples of some of the most critical social relationships include relationships with work colleagues and social connections through clubs or other social programming. Boreham et al.

also claim that strong ties with individuals outside of one's immediate circle (friends and family) create higher levels of social well-being rather than strong ties to family and friends alone. An example of this would be relationships with individuals at a community centre one attends or those in a shared club or social organization.

In addition to rescued food creating social spaces, I often saw this food being used as a tool in enticing people to initially show up at these charities offering social services. Charities would offer food to individuals in hopes that after receiving this food, these individuals would sign up for a selection of programs. While we have seen that food does bring people together, there is a difference between food being used to create a social space, and food being used to draw people in for social services. The Dixon Street Flats *Free Café* discussed above was a social project that BGI started as an offshoot from their original social programming, so residents were not required to sign up for services in order to partake in the *Free Café*. However, in cases such as BGI's regular offered programming, people must register for a program before receiving food. Registration includes giving basic personal information such as employment status and income, marital status, number of children and/or dependants, etc. An example of a BGI program comes from Jane (who we saw in chapter four) who signed up for parenting classes and a mentor program for her son because she is a single mother, which will be further discussed below. Once registered, these residents receive a food parcel once a week from BGI in addition to the programming they take part in. Regardless of this requirement, rescued food remained capable of initiating action (Weiss 1996), as once people were in the centres (thanks to the food) taking part in programs, they were learning new skills such as parenting tips at BGI or cooking and food budgeting at *WELLfed*.

5.2 What else is Possible? Empowerment, Education, and Skill Building

As we have seen, once rescued food begins its journey it can create and facilitate social interaction for those along its path. However, this food does even more than generate a level of sociability because it also contributes to a sense of empowered citizens through education and skill building. Not only did I see a clear example of this at *WELLfed*, but empowerment exuded from the entire notion of the *WELLfed* initiative. After each cooking session at *WELLfed*, everyone sits down to share the meal they had cooked together that morning (the instructors make an extra dish to share for this purpose of social interaction). One day while we were eating lunch together, Faith, one of the women from the class, told us a story in which she made a beef stew for a church function. She said she never would have cooked for others before because she often felt as though her cooking was not good enough. However, she said she had made this stew at *WELLfed* before, and a few times at home, so then felt confident enough to make it for her church. She said she did not tell anyone at the event that she was the one who made it but that she was happy to be anonymous and hear what people had to say about the stew. She was pleased that everyone loved it; it was a big hit. Everyone listening at the *WELLfed* table was very supportive and excited for her. According to Faith and other *WELLfed* students I spoke with, the skills they learn at these classes give them confidence in the kitchen to not only cook for their families, but people in their other social circles as well such as friends or neighbours, or in Faith's case, her church group. Although the students did not explicitly use the word 'empowerment', many of them reported feeling very good about being able to now cook for their families; to know that they can provide healthy foods for their children themselves- all of which would not have been possible without this rescued food.

While building this confidence in learning how to cook and feed their families with healthy foods, these students are also learning how to limit their production of food waste. The *WELLfed* instructors incorporate simple practices and strategies for this into their classes. For example: how to use each part of the vegetable in which the stems can be stored in the freezer and used to make soup broth. Here, we can see rescued food is used as a conduit in teaching sustainable food preparation and consumption practices. These teachings helped *WELLfed* families to start thinking about what they can do in their everyday lives to limit their own food waste, which then contributes to sustainable lifestyles while simultaneously helping them to stretch their dollar further. In addition to these sustainable practices that are being learned, *WELLfed* is currently working on cultivating their own fruit and vegetable gardens in the field next to their facility. The plan is to use these gardens to supplement the rescued food they receive from Kaibosh. This could also create an opportunity for *WELLfed* students to learn about fruit and vegetable gardening as well.

However, *WELLfed* was not the only facility in which I saw education programs using Kaibosh rescued food. As mentioned in the previous chapter, the *Boys & Girls Institute* leads cooking classes for teens with minor disabilities, and parenting classes for new parents. Jane, the recipient I spoke with at BGI, told me that she helps the coordinators facilitate a “Paper Bag Lunch” program in which they teach high school aged students basic cooking skills over their lunch break. The students learn how to make simple things such as sandwiches or pasta. Jane said the students make the food themselves and then can bring it back to school. I got the sense that some of them would not have a lunch otherwise. Jane also said she had enrolled her elder son for the “Challenge for Change” program offered through BGI, which is a mentoring program for young boys with single mothers. Jane said Aiden, her son’s mentor, would come over for

dinner at their home and spend time with her son; an experience she reported as being very helpful for both her and her son. Jane also attended parenting classes at BGI after she had been newly separated. She said she is “connected to a lot of agencies” which help her with resources and said it has helped her to cope a lot better with raising two kids on her own. She feels as though she is able to support herself through the help that she is getting with these programs offered at BGI. It is worth noting that this case is one in which we can see how rescued food has been used as a tool to draw Jane into BGI before she began participating in social programming, as explained above, ultimately facilitating action.

The cases presented above exemplify that rescued food can foster confidence and empowerment through education and skill building both directly (cooking classes) and indirectly (food as incentive to join program). Thus, we can see the multiple meanings (Weiss 1996) and subsequent values of rescued food. Yes, it is a source of nourishment for families, but it is also: a facilitator of social interaction; a vessel from which to learn; and a tool in encouraging confidence and empowerment of local residents. Thus, we can see that an alternative measurement of well-being enables us to look beyond material and economic wealth to question where else individuals might be finding positive and productive life experiences.

To conclude, for those who are food insecure, there are other attributes to food that might be just as valuable to them as the nutritional aspects. Kerner et al. (2015, 42) explain that if we focus solely on the ‘right to food’ when investigating food security, we will miss out on the social evolution and history of the power of nurture within commensality which is seen through the relations that food and eating create. Although my work is not focused on commensality, it does highlight the social environment that transpires when food is present.

Chapter 6: Summary and Conclusions

The sun was setting and the sky was changing colours from blue, to pink, to orange, as I walked along the waterfront with a friend during my last evening in Wellington. It was at this time that I reflected on the last nine weeks I had spent in this city, discussing the ups and downs of the past couple of months. I talked about my ideas of 'food waste' and how they have changed over the course of my study; initially, I had not expected Kaibosh to be receiving the sheer volume of food that they were picking up each day due to 'food waste', and I realized this food was still perfectly good to eat. We also talked about the prevalence of food waste and food insecurity in Wellington as part of a developed nation, and that it is not something the average person may think about very often or even realize is an issue until confronted with it.

Recently, research in food security has begun to focus on countries in the developed world. Because of this attention, multiple government and policy responses to food insecurity are becoming topics of interest. Interventions, such as those discussed in chapter two, include welfare systems (Davis and Geiger, 2017), foodbanks (Davis and Geiger 2017; Holmes et al. 2018; Tarasuk and Eakin 2003), opening new supermarkets in food desert regions (Brinkley et al. 2017), increasing food production (Government of Canada 2018), and income support strategies (Martorell 2017). At the local level, non-governmental organizations are addressing food insecurity through multiple initiatives, different from those seen at the governmental level. Such initiatives may include cooking and gardening classes (Martorell 2017), urban agriculture (Duignan 2011), and food rescue (Duignan 2011; Eversole 2014; Lee and Diprose 2017; Warshawsky 2015). Initiatives implemented at the local level are unique because they have been shown to provide residents with a greater motivation to help (as opposed to engaging in non-local work), as they work together with both friends and strangers in their own neighbourhoods (Nonini 2013). In addition, those working for initiatives at the local level may possess a specific knowledge of the particular issues and potential feasible solutions through their lived experiences in the area when compared to those from a more removed position (Boyer 2010; Nonini 2013).

6.1 Kaibosh Case Study: An Urban Perspective

My study has focused on one form of local initiative; Kaibosh Food Rescue in Wellington, New Zealand. Obtaining perspectives from Kaibosh staff, social service charity staff, and individual food recipients provided a well-rounded view of the operations and, to a lesser extent, outcomes of this food aid initiative in Wellington. Through my research I have found that rescued food, although seen as ‘food waste’ by supermarkets, still has much nutritional value when it is redistributed to those in need, as seen in chapter four. I learned that Kaibosh is an initiative that started small and quickly gained a large following. This was due not only to Kaibosh’s practical attitude towards redistributing rescued and perfectly good food to charities, but also for their determination in successfully passing a bill called the *Good Samaritan Clause* in the New Zealand Food Act that waives legal liabilities for all food donors, and thus, obtains support from both residential volunteers and retail businesses.

Another component specific to my case study is its focus on the *urban* environment. Kaibosh and the charities they support operate exclusively in urban and peri-urban neighbourhoods. As such, Kaibosh offers their services to charities who are working to meet the specific needs of urban populations experiencing food insecurity. As I saw throughout my fieldwork, there was an overarching paradox present in which many of the food recipients I spoke with while visiting Kaibosh-supported charities were experiencing feelings of loneliness and isolation, despite living in very close proximity to a great number of people. As I described in chapter five, many food recipients expressed to me their feelings of appreciation in having a space they could come to talk to others, whether they needed food that week or not. To me, this signifies that an overall decrease in social living in urban settings, in some cases, could be attributed to the prominence of smaller household units with more cases of people living alone

and/or in assisted living, or those living where they can afford but not necessarily an area they would have chosen otherwise. This issue of social isolation seen in urban settings is one that some Wellington charities aim to address, which is made possible by the food provided by Kaibosh as it appeared that food helped to bridge this gap through bringing people together.

6.2 Following the Social Life of Food and its Changing Values

Throughout the thesis we have followed rescued food waste through both its material and social impacts to trace the different values, meanings, and potentials it embodies. We have seen food play many roles in the lives of its recipients: a “social glue” (Quandt et al. 2001); a stimulator for action (Weiss 1996); a pre-text for gathering (Danesi 2018); a vessel for education, skill building and empowerment; and, of course, nutritional nourishment. Rather than focusing on one aspect or function of an item, this method of examination allowed me to explore food as the multifaceted object it is. When we follow this food through its lifespan, including its ‘after-life’ (once it is no longer a commodity), many other possibilities become illuminated.

In addition, following rescued food waste demonstrates the subjectivity in value of commodities. As Appadurai (1986) notes, if we focus on the *item and its journey* rather than the *method of exchange*, we can gain perspective on different meanings and values that objects may lose or gain throughout their lifespan. As we have seen, food which was once firmly in a commodity situation with monetary exchange value, loses this status and becomes ‘waste’ once consumer demand and/or usability are diminished. However, as this food is indeed at one moment considered “waste” by some, it is *also* considered to be nutritionally and socially valuable to many others as seen in chapters four and five.

In some sense I could argue that this food waste has agency. Much as Wagner (2013, 3) uses Latour's actor network theory to describe agency by way of *impact* rather than *intentionality* to argue that "social practices shape and are shaped by water", we can see that food has the same impact. As we have seen throughout the thesis, food has undeniably been demonstrated to have an impact on the actors it comes into contact with (e.g. individual recipients). Despite having been defined as 'waste', this rescued food has shown us that it has the ability to create social spaces just by its very presence and can also foster education and skill building. I had not initially considered food to have agency when I began my study. However, through following the food I did indeed realize that food has an impact on our social practices, and in this sense, just as Wagner refers to water, food could be seen to have agency. This form of agency of food with all the different meanings it may take on (social, educational, etc.), and that has an impact on our social practices, is what contributes to my understanding of food rescue as a food utopia of sorts.

6.3 Kaibosh as a Food Utopia Experiment: Thinking About Food Waste Differently in Wellington (and Beyond)

In the words of Ruby, the original founder of Kaibosh: "For us, Kaibosh was about solving a big problem. It was an experiment to see if we could provide a solution" (Kaibosh 2019). Kaibosh diverges from what may be considered as the regular path of the food system. It rescues food that had previously been deemed a terminal commodity (Appadurai 1986) and creates possibilities for that food that otherwise would have been thrown away. Not only is this food passed on to people who need it, but it creates something other than its original purpose of nourishment as I certainly did see evidence of food waste creating sociability between people who are seeking social ties in Wellington. Accordingly, throughout the thesis we have seen the

different values and meanings food can take on and create. Through concrete examples from my fieldwork with accounts from individuals I spent time with and interviewed, we were able to see the specific impacts rescued food has on the lives of some individuals in Wellington and thus obtain a small glimpse of the potential of our food systems. These real-life accounts provided evidence that the value of food corresponds to its potential to create social spaces, relationships, education, empowerment, skill building and trust, in addition to its nutritional value.

Furthermore, Kaibosh has done a number of things to open space for food rescue to be accepted in public discourse on food insecurity initiatives. First, they have passed a bill in parliament, making food rescue more accessible and practical for major supermarkets in New Zealand to subscribe to the initiative without fear of legal liability. This new legislation opened a discourse that enabled food waste collection and redistribution to be considered not only an acceptable response to the issue of food waste in New Zealand but one that is “common sense”, as many of my interlocutors noted. Second, Kaibosh’s social media platforms (Instagram and Facebook) offer direct accounts and ideas of what can be done with food waste (e.g. recipes, first-hand accounts of how receiving food has impacted recipients’ lives, etc.). This brings the idea of food waste redistribution to the public so people can learn about it as it is happening in their local city. It also helps to ignite a shift in the perceptions of food waste from local citizens, causing the redistribution of ‘waste’ food in Wellington to now be seen as completely acceptable by many people rather than “gross” or “unsavory.” Even more concretely, statistics provided by Kaibosh on food waste collected and redistributed helps to raise awareness on how big an issue food waste really is. Rather than taking a pessimistic approach to the overproduction of food, it is turned into a positive with options offered as to what can be done with this food, such as giving it to charities and ultimately on to food insecure individuals.

As we take a step back to consider all that we have learned at ground level with Kaibosh and food rescue in Wellington, we are able to put the different pieces together between Kaibosh, their donors, their charities, other food rescue initiatives in the city, and finally individual recipients. I initially thought food rescue to be a food utopia because it was an initiative aimed at: 1) reducing food waste *and*; 2) feeding people in need. Now, however, after completing my fieldwork and having analyzed my observations, interviews and daily interactions, I can see a larger potential at work here in that alternative food networks can be capable of even more. I see the way Wellington approaches food rescue to be a food utopia because this food system has opened a space for considering new and different ways of feeding those in need, and the results are encouraging. Not only has Kaibosh produced positive results for reducing food poverty and food waste in Wellington which was (and continues to be) their official mandate when they first conceived this experiment of food rescue, but the outcomes are also successful in a number of other ways that go beyond Kaibosh's initial goals. To be sure, evidence suggests that Kaibosh is indeed helping to reduce food waste and feed those in need in the Wellington area, and other parts of the country have since picked up the concept of 'food rescue' as well, indicating that the initiative is spreading. However, I also saw the incorporation of *additional* positive benefits for food recipients that transpired within this food rescue model: the creation of social spaces and social lives; empowerment; education; skill building; and enhanced well-being, which may all be facilitated by Kaibosh-supported charities, but is set in motion by the work Kaibosh is doing whether it was their intention or not. Thus, the Kaibosh Food Rescue initiative illustrates an example of what is possible- sometimes unexpectedly so- when we engage in the productiveness of food utopias and their capacity to open our ways of thinking about food systems to uncover new possibilities.

When discussing food utopias and how they can highlight *both* critical and hope-filled stories, Stock et al. (2015, 1) say: “An era of cheap food parallels a society of disposability in which not just off-sized carrots get tossed but people of certain classes, countries, and ethnicities are deemed disposable.” This highlights some of the pre-existing skewed values within our food system that have far reaching impacts for not only the wastage of food, but for individuals and their families, especially for those most vulnerable. With this in mind, we can examine our food systems to expose the tensions and barriers that exist while ultimately working to alleviate them and accommodate different needs through non-discriminatory approaches that attempt to lessen the stigma often associated with food aid. I believe taking a closer look at alternative food networks, such as food rescue, allows us to stop and think about the many values of food and its potential, not only as a commodity being sold to those who can afford it, but as an essential part of human life which provides both nutritional and social benefits to all people.

Throughout this thesis I have woven together two streams of ideas: the multiple and changing values of food; and the concept of “food utopias.” Through following ‘waste’ food on its journey, we have learned of its multiple and changing values based on the wide range of potential that food embodies. Understanding these values allows us to discern the multiple outcomes food provisioning services may have and can ultimately help in constructing policies and initiatives to alleviate urban food security. Thus, food networks use *multiple* values of food that are linked together, creating a whole that is greater than the sum of each individual part. For example, communal cooking classes show positive results because they create social interaction *and* feed those in need. Consequently, the outcomes seen through multiple positive benefits- both planned and unplanned- of Kaibosh’s attempt to experiment with ‘waste’ food to alleviate food insecurity, establishes it is a good example of what a food utopia can actually do.

6.4 Re-thinking “The Food Bank” and “Food Waste” within Food Utopias: Comments and Critiques

Kaibosh is not single-handedly alleviating food insecurity in Wellington, nor do they claim to be. However, Kaibosh does claim to carry-out a very practical job in assuming the role as the link between food waste and the redistribution processes to get the food to people that need it the most. As my research has shown, yes, they do get the food to people who need it for nutritional purposes, but it also does a number of other things including facilitate sociability and learning. The manner in which I can see food waste redistribution to be addressing food insecurity is when it is used as one tool among many when offering social services to individuals. This means keeping people healthy and fed while they search for jobs, work on their mental health, learn how to cook for their families, etc. Food waste redistribution should therefore be offered as part of a “package deal” because as we know, giving free food alone will not address food insecurity.

Often, the majority of food in conventional food banks is not quality produce, rather more along the lines of canned and dry goods (Tarasuk and Eakin, 2003). However, it is important to note this is not always the case and that community members and retail stores may indeed donate fresh produce to food banks in their area. Nonetheless, many food banks deliver or facilitate pick-ups of their food parcels for recipients which marks the end of the “interaction.” But, as we have seen in chapter five, much more can be incorporated to this process. Our ideas of food banks do not have to be so rigid. As we have seen, alternative visions- while not perfect- do have a lot of offer in terms of both nutritional and social benefits. Kaibosh’s general manager Mark, sees the food Kaibosh gives to charities to be one tool that charities can use in their “toolbox” to provide those in need with the necessary resources to succeed. While my evidence is limited as

my study was not designed to look at the structure of these other charitable initiatives, there is some evidence to suggest that this model is beneficial to its recipients. Accordingly, it would appear that as food and sociability are so closely linked in the everyday, it would make sense to engage with a food system that encompasses each of these things. As we saw in chapter two, Tarasuk and Eakin (2013, 1508) note that some food banks are already practising this by offering resources such as help in job searching and training or help in finding affordable housing along with food aid. This is to say that this model of combining sociability and social services with food aid is not entirely unique. However, I believe it has the potential to be very productive and thus worth focusing on through further research.

Nonetheless, some researchers have rightfully expressed the idea of food banks perpetuating a broken system of giving handouts to people (Galli et al. 2019; Thompson et al. 2018). Giving food to people does not really change the (long-term) situation food recipients are in. However, food banks need not all operate in this way. Throughout my study, after engaging with the social service organizations associated with Kaibosh and learning about them first hand, I realized something of common sense after it was pointed out by Dianne at the *Linden Social Centre*: people cannot be productive, search for jobs, work on their mental health, etc., if they are hungry. Put another way, people who are not eating enough healthy foods would not have the same energy as those who are, and therefore not able to function in a similar capacity. In her work titled *Food Matters*, social worker Maxine Jacobson (2007, 41-2) calls for “a partnership between social justice and charitable giving to address the root causes of food insecurity and to promote self-reliance and empowerment.” Here, Jacobson is advocating for the employment of ‘community food assessments’ which mobilizes community participation, policy advocacy and research which are context specific, when studying food insecurity. Though this partnership is

not the main focus of my thesis, I did see evidence that food rescue created a space for some of these possibilities, however, further research would be needed to assess the practicality and success of this approach. Nevertheless, if we can leave behind our pre-existing ideas of food banks perpetuating the problem of food insecurity, and instead open our thinking to include ideas that accept food banks as a *first step* towards well-being when offered alongside social services, we can see that food banks have the potential to be productive.

With this said, as we learned in chapter two, we cannot ignore the critiques of food rescue for food banks that express concern as to how sustainable a system based on the *over*-production of food can really be (Galli et al. 2019). I realize that if the goal is to reduce food waste, and if global food systems do in fact begin to limit their food waste, the food rescue model of addressing food insecurity would cease to exist and therefore is not sustainable long-term. Though, as Stuary (2013) reminds us, European and North American countries constantly have their supermarket shelves stocked in surplus foods of 150-200%. Realistically, it is unlikely that the global overproduction of food (and consequently waste) in industrialized countries will be corrected in the near future. We can, however, while we do currently have food waste, redirect it to be used for human consumption. The developed world finds itself in this unique position because it produces so much more food than necessary to feed its populations, yet there are still people going without.

In addition, there is the question of using food to entice recipients into signing up for social services. Those I interviewed spoke highly of the charity with which they were affiliated, however, I realize this may not always be the case. This is to note that upon giving food parcels, these charities are not doing so with “no strings attached” per se. They do not force individuals to participate in social services if they later change their mind, however, in some cases, the idea is

for their participation to serve as a pre-text for receiving food parcels, which may or may not create a sense of pressure for the individual recipient depending on the circumstances.

An additional argument can be made for offering social services to individuals in this way; putting the onus on them for inequalities that are in actuality, systemic. Is giving local non-governmental organizations and charities the responsibility to mitigate the effects of food insecurity simply deferring a responsibility which should be that of the national government? Policy makers have long attempted to mitigate the effects of poverty through different strategies. However, as the struggle continues, encouraging individuals to exercise agency over their own lives by engaging in social services for skill building and education could prove beneficial. In addition, as we have seen, those working at the local level often have a better understanding of what individual food recipients need. This topic is outside the scope of my study, although further research on this would be interesting.

6.5 Concluding Remarks: Practical Significance, Limitations, and Remaining Questions

While exploratory and with limitations, studies such as this can aide policy makers who are considering best practices for implementing local level food aid initiatives. Throughout the thesis we have seen the process of food rescue come full circle; from commodity, to ‘food waste’, to rescued produce, to nutritionally and socially valuable food for individual recipients. This approach is useful in the study of food security and the charitable sector specifically because it allows us to see how to get the most out of a program with the best results for those participating in it at each stage of the process. Thus, through the case study provided, we have seen there is good reason to consider using rescued food waste in food insecurity programs.

Through obtaining perspectives from those “on the ground”, I have shown that not only does rescued food waste have the ability to feed bodies, but the potential for creating and facilitating a space for an array of social interactions and other opportunities for improving human well-being.

These social interactions can take the shape of informal “social networks”, as discussed in chapter two. Throughout my fieldwork the social side of food became quite clear to me. However, unfortunately as time constraints did not allow for an in-depth focus on individual food recipients, let alone further investigation of their social networks, I think further research on this would be beneficial in better understanding how urban populations cope with food insecurity. I would be interested to learn how the presence of social networks (or lack thereof) impact the food security of urban populations. I am also curious to know if a lack in access to these social networks and subsequent feelings of isolation and loneliness are *why* these individuals might seek out food aid initiatives such as the Kaibosh-supported charities I visited.

Although food rescue has been around for several years now, there has not been much research conducted on its effects on individual recipients. As Pottier (1999) suggests, if successful policy in food and food aid is to be created, policy makers must understand the diversity of *individuals* who are food insecure as their experiences with food aid differs from one person to the next. It is for this reason that ethnographic studies are beneficial for research such as this, as it allows us to gain an understanding and perspective of issues from those directly impacted. In studies for further research, it would be beneficial to undertake more research on: the impacts of food rescue on individual recipients, food recipients’ specific situations and their strategies in gaining access to food; the social well-being benefits for recipients participating in these food aid programs; and the *long-term* impacts food aid has on individual recipients. Though admittedly beyond the focus of my thesis, and certainly much more broad, I am

interested in some questions for further research within the topic of food security initiatives for industrialized nations: Do local level initiatives better address the needs of food insecure individuals than widespread government initiatives?; If yes, are they feasible and sustainable?; and What other ways is urban food insecurity being addressed in industrialized nations and what are the results?

Wellington is not only “the coolest little capital” as the city’s tagline suggests, it is also a place with big ideas. I feel grateful that I had the opportunity to learn from Wellingtonians in this small city with so much to offer. It is my hope that the work I conducted there will add to the discussion on urban food security for industrialized nations and shed light on possibilities within the food system to create different food futures, because in Wellington they are working on it in this way with encouraging results, and they are open to possibilities.

Endnotes

ⁱ Growing vegetables along top and sides of a sack filled with soil thus taking up less space.

ⁱⁱ All names of individuals I interviewed and met throughout my fieldwork have been changed in this paper to protect anonymity to the best of my ability.

ⁱⁱⁱ I found it interesting to learn that even though *Countdown* is now Australian owned, the *Woolworth's* in Australia has not adopted the food rescue policy even though it is a sister-store of *Countdown New Zealand*, and food rescue *is* practiced in Australia.

^{iv} Kaibosh also reduced their carbon emissions by 106,391 kgs.

^v The *Newtown Community & Cultural Centre* two blocks away from the Mission hosts a free lunch on Fridays in response to the Mission's closure on this day of the week.

^{vi} Denise had only held the position for two months at the time of our meeting in August 2019.

^{vii} It is interesting to note that two members of the Kaibosh staff told me that charities are not in contact with one another. To quote Liam, the operations manager at the Kaibosh Lower Hutt location: "they do their own thing." I surmised this to mean as the alliance between Wellington charities is relatively new, possibly not all Kaibosh members are caught up on this emerging trend. Considering the limited direct contact Kaibosh has with some of its charities, as Kaibosh prefers to operate 'behind the scenes', this mismatch in claims was not overly surprising.

^{viii} In examining the spatial and temporal aspects of commensality, Kerner et al. (2015, 24) explain that this can shed light on changes in social systems. When discussing an example from Buddhist beliefs, Kerner et al. say that "accepting food and eating together can be a powerful form of resistance to racism and injustice."

^{ix} It took four months to obtain clearance from *Housing New Zealand* to re-open the room, after it had been closed for several years due to building residents abusing the space with drinking and drugs.

^x All of whom she knew by name.

^{xi} I got the sense that since it was Karen introducing me, residents felt that I could be trusted without much inquiry at all. There was a feeling of trust among the residents for those who worked at BGI.

^{xii} Denise said that many years ago, when she and her family immigrated to New Zealand, they had a hard time meeting people and initially establishing themselves. So, her desire to help in this way stemmed from personal experience.

^{xiii} The first time I volunteered here I was asked if I wanted to take a bag of food home. I initially declined because I felt uneasy taking food when there could be other people who need it more than I do. The manager of the food container (where the food is sorted and handed out)- who was a student conducting her PhD in food security- told me that when all volunteers take food at the end of their shift it "helps keep equality between us all." This potentially harks back to the sharing of food at that Kerner et al. (2015) spoke of; I got the sense that by giving *everyone* equal opportunity to obtain food, the program coordinators hope to break down barriers between those of different classes.

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