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**‘MORE THAN FOOD’:  
A CRITICAL DISCOURSE AND DISPOSITIVE  
ANALYSIS OF FOOD CHARITY IN THE UK**

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A thesis submitted to the University of Huddersfield  
in partial fulfilment of the requirements  
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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## **ABSTRACT**

Following the financial crisis of 2008 and years of subsequent austerity policies in the UK, food banks and other charities have expanded rapidly in professional networks with corporate partners and advice agencies. Despite a growing academic interest in the causes and experiences of food bank use, existing research remains largely concerned with collecting evidence without any critical engagement with the discourses, power relationships and subjectifying practices inside food banks.

Using a discursive approach, this study aimed to reconstruct how food poverty is problematised by food charities in their everyday practices with implications for the formation of new subjectivities. Combining critical discourse theory with situational analysis, it seeks to provide a critical ontology capable of challenging dominant knowledge of food charity as inevitable effect of austerity. A visual corpus of images of Neighbourhood Food Collections (NFCs) at UK supermarkets was analysed together with supporting documents and videos to explore how food poverty is made visible. Interviews were conducted with volunteers and managers at three food banks, followed by situational mapping and analysis in MAXQDA.

Analysis shows that NFCs normalise charitable giving through appeals to community and problematisations of hunger in a consumerist spectacle, while causes of poverty and the poor remain absent and excluded. Problematising not only short-term material needs but also 'chaotic' lives and psychological deficits, food banks increasingly mobilise behavioural interventions to transform 'clients' into active and responsible subjects. In the therapeutic space of food banks, 'clients' are required to confess their crisis, perform their worthiness and optimise their economic potential. Volunteers remain in a pastoral position of authority, negotiating and translating neoliberal discourses into situated practices.

Reflecting on the role of food charity within a larger biopolitical regime shown to localise, medicalise and psychologise poverty, the thesis concludes by calling for a re-politicisation and the decolonisation of poverty research.

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# Contents

<b>1 Introduction .....</b>	<b>9</b>
Background and rationale .....	9
Research approach .....	11
Structure.....	13
<b>2 The discursive limits of food poverty research: A critical review .....</b>	<b>15</b>
The rise of food banks in the UK.....	16
What causes food bank growth? .....	17
Constructions of risk and vulnerability in health research .....	20
A new science of food poverty?.....	23
The other side of food banking: Spaces of stigma, shame and lived austerity .....	24
Corporate food aid and the institutionalisation of food charity .....	30
Limits to critique and the Right to Food.....	34
Food poverty research as discursive capital.....	39
Decolonising poverty research .....	42
<b>3 Toward a critical ontology of food charity today.....</b>	<b>46</b>
Research aims and philosophy.....	48
Aim 1: Reconstructing problematisations of food poverty.....	48
Aim 2: Challenging the normality of food charity .....	52
Aim 3: Exploring and resisting the subjection and subjectification of food bank ‘clients’ and volunteers .....	55
Discourse analysis in psychology: A critical introduction – and a rejection .....	58
Discursive psychology .....	58
‘Foucauldian’ discourse analysis .....	62
Theoretical and methodological foundations .....	64
Entanglements of discourse, power and materiality .....	65
Discourse research as politicising activity.....	69
From discourse to dispositive analysis: Implications for research design.....	72
Situational analysis as a toolbox for critical qualitative research .....	76

Taking stock and moving beyond discourse analysis .....	82
Neighbourhood Food Collections: Visual data collection and analysis .....	83
Visual discourse analysis and mapping in MAXQDA .....	86
Supporting documents and videos: Collection and analysis.....	91
Interviews: Access, selection and ethics .....	93
Textual analysis and situational mapping.....	97
Social worlds/arena maps and comparative mapping .....	100
Initial reflections .....	102
Ethical considerations .....	102
Reflexivity.....	103
<b>4 Neighbourhood Food Collections: ‘Every can helps’? .....</b>	<b>105</b>
Collection points: #everycanhelps .....	107
Neighbourhood discourse and quantification of generosity .....	108
Materialisations of food aid: Knowledge made visible and powerful .....	112
The (dis)positioning of volunteers .....	116
Self-positioning at collections: Putting discourses into visible practice .....	116
Offered subject positions in documents & websites.....	122
Subjectification and self-positioning by volunteers as active speakers .....	128
Constructing subjects of food charity .....	132
Discursive presence and (in)visibility at collections .....	132
Making visible the ‘worthy poor’ .....	135
Referral and medicalisation of poverty .....	140
Food aid as crisis management .....	142
Subjectification and self-positioning by clients .....	146
Conducting consumer conduct in the spectacle of food charity .....	151
Failures in disposition and possible resistance .....	155
Conclusion.....	157
<b>5 Discipline and feed: Food poverty, pastoral power and the limits of charity</b>	<b>161</b>
Local problematisations of food poverty.....	162

Problematisation 1: Food poverty as sudden crisis driven by structural factors .....	163
Problematisation 2: Food poverty as personal chaos and culture of poverty .....	167
Problematisation 3: Food poverty as result of a failing society .....	172
Local constructions of food poverty as a social problem.....	176
Solving food poverty through emergency food aid .....	178
Franchised vs. independent food charity .....	180
Parcel composition and food choices .....	182
Food charity as pastoral care in rural areas .....	189
Discipline, conditionality and limits of charity.....	194
Eligibility and referral .....	195
Managerial discretion and competition between pastors .....	199
Conditionality and the persistence of discipline .....	201
The limits of emergency food interventions .....	203
Resisting institutionalisation .....	205
Conclusion.....	207
<b>6 ‘More than food’: Crisis management and the psychologisation of poverty .</b>	<b>209</b>
Food banks as therapeutic spaces .....	210
Diagnosis, avowal and treatment of clients.....	210
Therapeutic treatment and specialisation.....	216
‘More than Food’ programmes.....	219
‘Eat well – spend less’ .....	222
Social spaces and ‘job clubs’ .....	232
Conclusion.....	237
<b>7 The biopolitics of food charity: Localisation, medicalisation and psychologisation .....</b>	<b>240</b>
From pastoral power to the biopolitics of food charity.....	241
Localisation: Governing poverty at a distance .....	245
Big Society and new localisms .....	245
Governing hunger through community .....	250
Medicalisation: Diagnosing vulnerabilities and governing through crisis .....	252

Feeding bodies as initial treatment .....	255
Psychologisation: The making of resilient subjects .....	256
Psychopolitics, therapeutic domination and the biohuman .....	257
Governing food poverty through resilience.....	260
Conclusion.....	264
<b>8 Concluding reflections .....</b>	<b>267</b>
Key findings and contributions.....	267
Methodological reflections and limitations .....	271
From refusal to innovation: The value of critique .....	273
<b>References .....</b>	<b>277</b>
<b>Appendices .....</b>	<b>293</b>
Appendix A: Interview codes .....	293
Appendix B: Template for Ordered Situational Map.....	295
Appendix C: Questions for visual materials.....	296
Appendix D: Interview schedule .....	297

## List of figures

Figure 1 Food charity as dispositive (adapted from Jäger, 2012).....	74
Figure 2 Coded image segments in MAXQDA.....	89
Figure 3 Relational map in MAXMaps .....	91
Figure 4 Codes (left), memos (top), data (centre) and abstract map (right) in MAXQDA ...	100
Figure 5 Smallville social arena map .....	101
Figure 6 Collection point .....	107
Figure 7 Collection points .....	107
Figure 8 Collection point with trolleys .....	113
Figure 9 Shopping trolleys.....	114
Figure 10 Volunteers greeting shoppers .....	117
Figure 11 Costumed volunteers at entrance.....	117



Figure 12 Volunteer approaching shopper .....	118
Figure 13 Adult and child posing with photo frame .....	120
Figure 14 "Let's be heroes against UK hunger" .....	123
Figure 15 Clients' quotes on display.....	135
Figure 16 Pre-packed "family meals" at a CP.....	139
Figure 17 Signposting areas inside food banks.....	210

## **List of tables**

Table 1 Twitter corpus and images .....	86
Table 2 Supporting documents.....	92
Table 3 Food bank sites and interviews.....	95

## **List of abbreviations**

SFB – Smallville Food Bank  
WFB – Westmarch Food Bank  
LFB – Laketown Food Bank  
NFCs – Neighbourhood Food Collections  
CP – Collection Point  
MTF – More Than Food  
RTF – Right to Food

# 1 Introduction

## Background and rationale

When Professor Philip Alston, the UN special rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights, released his preliminary report on the state of poverty in the UK in December 2018, he singled out the growth of food banks and other charities following years of austerity and benefit cuts:

*“Cuts to social support, preventative services, and local councils mean that when people need help, there are fewer resources to support them, causing them to rely on charities and crisis services. One front line worker told me that they are referring people to food banks because “people have exhausted the possibility of borrowing from their families and friends, defaulted on their loans, and have nowhere else to go”. [...] Food bank use is up almost four-fold since 2012 and there are now about 2,000 food banks in the UK, up from just 29 at the height of the financial crisis.” (Alston, 2018)*

Recent surveys and mapping by the Independent Food Aid Network (2018) have indeed found that there are now 1,235 food banks operating under the Trussell Trust in addition to an estimated number of 803 independent food banks, bringing the total number to at least 2,038 food banks across the UK. Other charitable food providers include FareShare who collect, distribute and prepare surplus food and a wide range of independent food aid providers providing “pay as you feel” cafes, soup kitchens, breakfast clubs and social supermarkets. More than 60% of food banks are run under the national franchise of the Trussell Trust, a Christian charity providing a start-up manual, branded websites, fundraising materials and other support to churches in return for an annual fee. All Trussell Trust food banks employ a referral system whereby ‘clients’ must first be issued a voucher by a recognised referral agency, such as Citizens Advice Bureau, GPs or social workers. The voucher can then be exchanged for a 3-

day ‘emergency food’ parcel containing essential items where the maximum number of parcels is limited to 3 per 6-month period. Independent food banks, meanwhile, vary considerably in their organisation and operating procedures, are not necessarily church based and may not employ a referral system or limit the number of food parcels given out.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, Alston’s (2018) scathing report on the impacts of austerity has received mixed reactions among senior politicians, with work and pensions secretary Amber Rudd condemning the “extraordinary political nature of his language” (Walker, 2018) without disputing the findings. Food bank use has long been interpreted in very contrasting ways, with Conservative MP Jacob Rees-Mogg describing their growth as “rather uplifting” and positive expression of compassion (Peck, 2017), while senior Labour figures frequently point to food banks as a national disgrace and direct result of the government’s austerity policies (Eagle, 2015). Although the causal links between austerity, the introduction of universal credit and the growth of charitable food aid remain heavily disputed, there appears to be a consensus building in national commentaries and media reporting which frequently scandalises the need for food banks, while praising the kindness of volunteers and success of food banks which are often claimed to “arise naturally, in local communities” (McLeod, 2015). These perspectives tend to construct food banks as necessary, albeit shameful, community-based responses to increased demand caused by welfare retrenchment. Although there is now a rapidly expanding field of interdisciplinary research into food charities and the causes and experiences of food poverty, existing studies suffer from the same essentialism which only considers food banks and other institutions as a direct effect of austerity. The problem here is that analyses driven by exclusive concerns for establishing causality through evidence collection reduce food charities to mere symptoms while naturalising them as essential institutions in times of austerity. Such arguments construct food charity practices as natural response, disregarding how they may have productive effects in their own rights. This study therefore explores the internal power dynamics, productive discourses and interactions between volunteers and ‘clients’ which have so far evaded critical analysis.

Here, I am particularly interested in how ‘food poverty’ comes to be problematised by food bank staff in their everyday practices within a local setting and how ‘clients’ of charity are discursively positioned across different services, giving particular attention to the referral system and food parcel distribution. Whereas the following chapter will show existing research to uncritically endorse so-called ‘More than Food’ services delivered by food banks, which include a variety of skills training, budgeting and cooking courses, this study critically examines the rationalities, power effects and implications for subjectivity across these services.

## **Research approach**

Overall, this study aims to make a critical contribution to debates inside and outside academia by challenging the essentialness of food charity, its normalising power and claims of providing universal solutions to natural human needs. It makes both methodological and theoretical contributions to critical psychology, understood not as a sub-discipline but as “an academic pursuit, engaging in historical study of the assumptions made by the discipline or promoting alternative accounts of subjectivity” (Parker, 2007, p.139). The study thus aims to problematise psychological explanations of poverty and seemingly common-sense behavioural interventions by food charities through an analysis of power relationships and subjectifying practices. Assumptions about naturalised categories of vulnerable ‘clients’ in individualised crises can then be challenged and make way for historically and theoretically grounded understandings of how subjects of food charity are produced. Rather than prescribe solutions outside of this normalising power, new understandings of food charity and neoliberal government may inform collective attempts to transform social realities by disrupting dominant discourses and letting alternatives emerge. Given the “unevenness, its lack of self-identity, its spatial and temporal variability” (Brown, 2015, p. 21), I will consider neoliberalism as a loose thought collective rather than coherent rationality (Dean, 2011) which broadly seeks to impose capitalist market principles in all areas of cultural, social and personal life.

*“The purpose of theorizing is not to enhance one’s intellectual or academic reputation but to enable us to grasp, understand, and explain [...] the historical world and its processes; and thereby to inform our practice so that we may transform it.” (Hall, 1988, p. 36)*

By making situated discursive processes into the objects of analysis, a social constructionist approach (Burr, 2015) may challenge how seemingly natural concepts like ‘food poverty’ and categories of volunteers and ‘clients’ are produced through discourse. Whereas traditional qualitative “methodologies often reify categories, making them seem natural and enduring” (Phillips & Hardy, 2002, p. 13) by documenting experiences, discourse analysis explores and challenges their socially constructed nature and wider power effects. A critical discursive approach sensitive to neglected power dynamics thus promises new insights into how food banks as institutions are constructed and maintained through discursive and non-discursive practices, how food poverty is being problematised by expert authorities and how new subjectivities as ways of experiencing and understanding the self are being created. Situated subjectification within food bank spaces will be central to this analysis, understood as a performative and non-linear “process of becoming subordinated by power as well as the process of becoming a subject” (Butler, 1997, p. 2). Instead of merely filling a gap in provision, food banks and partner organisations will be considered as productive spaces where discourses are materialised and lived out to form new subjectivities.

Without applying standardised methods, the study takes a reflexive and flexible approach by combining methodological and theoretical insights from critical discourse theory (Jäger, 2015), dispositive analysis (Bühmann & Schneider, 2008) and governmentality studies (Dean, 2010). Recent developments in situational analysis (Clarke, Friese, & Washburn, 2017) will allow accounting for complexity, contradictions and the active role of subjects in negotiating and putting available discourses into practice while avoiding deterministic accounts and generalisations about the workings of power. Situational maps and established

methods from grounded theory facilitate comparisons between sites and guide data collection and relational analysis for new and surprising insights.

## Structure

The proposed critical approach first requires setting aside established assumptions about food charity practices, including normative value judgments and universal praise for volunteering as much as any condemnations of charitable food aid as de-politicising or inappropriate poverty relief. Instead, a critical ontology (Dean, 1996) would attempt to deprive food charities of their self-evident character in an effort to understand how they have come to be what they are today. In developing a discourse analytic approach suited for my research aims, I will be drawing extensively on the work of Michel Foucault who linked the critical potential of his philosophical stance to three central elements:

*“They are (1) the refusal to accept as self-evident the things that are proposed to us; (2) the need to analyze and to know, since we can accomplish nothing without reflection and understanding—thus, the principle of curiosity; and (3) the principle of innovation: to seek out in our reflection those things that have never been thought or imagined. Thus: refusal, curiosity, innovation.” (Foucault, 1988a, p. 1)*

Characterised by a radical anti-essentialism, these principles will prove useful in guiding this study and are reflected in the structure of the thesis. Beginning with the need to strip food charity of its status as self-evident, natural and effective expression of community, chapters 2 and 3 aim to demonstrate how established practices and assumptions have historical origins in problematisations which present charity as true solution through normalisation over time. Beginning with a critical review, chapter 2 considers the discursive limits of food poverty research which remains trapped within a negative conception of power and an empiricist paradigm of evidence collection. Considering the value of this research to charities, businesses and academics as discursive capital, I advocate a turn towards decolonising poverty research

with a better awareness for situated knowledges. Chapter 3 then develops precise research aims and questions before discussing methodological foundations in discourse and dispositive analysis and reflecting on the research process. The required refusal (1) of charity as natural solution and expression of human kindness is then followed by the second principle in applying curiosity (2) through an empirically grounded analysis in chapters 4 to 6 to understand how normality is produced in everyday settings, how food poverty is problematised by active speakers and what the power effects are of different interventions within food bank spaces. Chapter 4 begins with an original analysis of Neighbourhood Food Collections (NFCs) at UK supermarkets, while chapters 5 and 6 critically examine local problematisations, disciplinary practices and non-food programmes across three food banks. Drawing together key insights, chapter 7 offers a wider discussion of food charity in the context of neoliberal government to formulate a critique of the dominant discourses and therapeutic interventions identified in this study. Finally, chapter 8 encourages innovation (3) and critical reflexivity through collective struggles and democratic debate to create new ways of problematising, reflecting upon and transgressing the limits imposed by the biopolitics of food charity.

## **Statement of Publication Arising from this Thesis**

The following publication has arisen from my research detailed in this thesis and contains a summary of methodological reflections on the use of visual data from chapter 3 and selected findings from chapter 4:

Moeller, C. (2019). 'Every can helps'? Using visual data in a dispositive analysis of food charity at UK supermarkets. In S. Bosancic & R. Keller (Eds.), *Diskursive Konstruktionen. Kritik, Materialität, Subjektivierung, Interdisziplinarität: Perspektiven Wissenssoziologischer Diskursforschung II*. Wiesbaden: Springer.

## **2 The discursive limits of food poverty research: A critical review**

According to official figures by the Trussell Trust (Loopstra, Flederjohann, Reeves, & Stuckler, 2018), the number of food banks within their national franchise expanded rapidly from 138 sites in 2012/2013 to 392 in 2015/2016 and currently stands at 428. In addition to the 1235 distribution centres by the Trussell Trust, there are at least 801 independent food banks (IFAN UK, 2018) for an estimated total of 2036 food banks in the UK. In their content analysis of UK newspaper coverage of food banks, Wells and Caraher (2014, p. 1439) found that no articles had mentioned food banks before 2008, few until 2012 (42) but then articles tripled by 2013 (131) in a steady development from an 'exotic' phenomenon to normalised "regular occurrence". Since then, food bank and food poverty research in the UK has equally proliferated from a marginal topic in social policy and human geography to a rapidly growing interdisciplinary field with support and funding by major research bodies and the two major UK food charities FareShare and the Trussell Trust.

This review sets out to provide a critical scope of the emerging knowledge within this literature, its productive effects for constituting 'food poverty' as an object of study, and the limits to critique and advocacy. After highlighting the on-going specialisation across different disciplines shaped by an empiricist paradigm, the dominant concerns with risk, health and vulnerability will be shown to medicalise poverty from a position of scientific expertise. While realist and positivist emphases in social policy research remain focused on establishing causal patterns and improving measurement, more critical voices will highlight the 'dark' side of food charity and new power dynamics in these distinctly 'other' spaces of shame and stigma. Drawing on insights from long-established networks of food charity in the US and Canada, critical perspectives will then challenge the institutionalisation of corporate food aid in times of austerity. I then turn to debates around the Right to Food (RTF) framework to argue that, despite its popular appeal as alternative solution to charitable expansion, rights-based discourses cannot provide the necessary critical analysis of food charity. Instead, I will argue



that an obsession with evidence collection in food poverty research presents a new form of discursive capital with material opportunities both for academic researchers and further expansion by charities. To challenge this development of food poverty research as a new science in a growing power-knowledge regime supported by corporate interests, I will advocate a decolonisation of methodologies which refuses to extract valuable knowledge from the poor who are routinely objectified as passive victims for scientific inquiry. Proposing a critical discursive approach, I will shift attention to the power effects and new subjectivities created in food bank spaces.

## **The rise of food banks in the UK**

Reporting on two reviews of food aid in the UK, Lambie-Mumford and Dowler (2014) identify the two main challenges from a social policy perspective in agreeing a consistent definition of food poverty and then developing reliable systems for measuring it as basis for effective government responses. These two central concerns with definitions and better measurement of food poverty already illustrate the limited scope of existing research. Elsewhere, Lambie-Mumford and O'Connell (2015) take stock of the current evidence base and knowledge gaps in the UK to reiterate the call for quantitative measurement of food poverty combined with qualitative efforts to document lived experiences, including specific health needs and impacts on vulnerable groups. This two-pronged approach to building an 'evidence base' is indeed characteristic of the field where positivistic attempts at measuring the problem combine with more realist concerns for the hidden structures of food poverty. Collecting evidence, and hence creating more scientific knowledge of poverty, is seen as goal in itself with the assumption that it will then inform government and lead to better policy responses. Remarkably, Lambie-Mumford and O'Connell (2015, p. 7) envision different research approaches and methodologies only as adding to a "rigorous evidence base" as a homogenous body of knowledge without any mention of critical contributions which may challenge some of the dominant assumptions or reflect on the effects on this growing expert regime. Far from aiming for structural changes or radical rethinking about the nature of poverty in highly industrialised

capitalist societies, this body of social policy research appears content with improving people's "food security" for example through expanding funding for schools and "civil society partnerships" involved in food provision. Although Lambie-Mumford and Dowler (2014, p. 1420) equally acknowledge that emergency food aid does not address underlying causes but only relieves symptoms, they fully and uncritically endorse the "non-food related support" as perhaps the "primary contribution charitable help offers". This failure to engage critically with the dominant discourses, underlying assumptions and actual effects of 'More than Food' services by established food bank academics presents an important gap but also points to an unwillingness to look beyond the popular narrative of inadequate emergency responses.

At an organisational level, Lambie-Mumford (2013) has tracked the growth of the national Trussell Trust network to 2004 where the franchising model proved vital in providing a "ready-made, reputable tool for local churches" to extend their own reach within local communities. Through this marketing model, the Trust specifically targets churches and media where benefit reforms and 'retreat' by the welfare state were seen by some managers as "an opportunity for the Church" and the "Christian community" as a whole. Based on rich interview data, she suggests that food banks have "come to fill a gap which has arisen from funding cuts" but despite linking austerity policies to a 'Big Society' discourse and move towards localised private provision of welfare, she does not examine the role that food banks themselves play in this move. Lambie-Mumford (2013, p. 82) also hints at a religious agenda within the Trust's Operating Manual but does not consider how these religious discourses manifest themselves in food bank practices.

### ***What causes food bank growth?***

Beyond documenting the growth of food banks and other charitable provision in the UK, academic research, some in close collaboration with the Trussell Trust, has been mainly concerned with collecting evidence of the main causal factors for increased referrals. There is a wide consensus within this literature built around a dominant narrative of welfare retrenchment and state retreat (see Caraher & Furey, 2018; Dowler & Lambie-Mumford,

2015b; Lambie-Mumford, 2018) to explain the rise of charitable food aid, while other largely quantitative designs seek to test hypotheses for these links between welfare reform and food bank growth (Loopstra et al., 2018; Loopstra, Reeves, Taylor-Robinson et al., 2015; Power, Small, Doherty, Stewart-Knox, & Pickett, 2018). Further expansion of food banks is then seen predominantly as a distraction (Caraher & Furey, 2018) from failures in government and shifting of responsibility, hence positioning food banks as merely filling an existing gap in service provision.

In her recent policy analysis, Lambie-Mumford (2018, p. 8) has argued that “state welfare retrenchment and increased conditionality were found to play an important role in driving need for food banks” in the UK. However, her analysis of neoliberal notions of personal responsibility and individualised causes of poverty remains confined to a policy level without consideration for how these discourses are taken up, of refuted, by the food charities themselves. The notion of welfare retrenchment then upholds a strict distinction between state power and private charities who are merely responding to new gaps left by austerity policies. Despite then highlighting the prominence of structural determinants as reported by managers, including benefit cuts and delays, Lambie-Mumford (2018, p. 12) locates “notions of behavioural and individual drivers of poverty” solely in policy discourses without consideration for how these may be reflected in the food bank’s own practices.

Loopstra, Reeves, and Stuckler (2015) similarly show how the odds of new food banks opening increased in areas with greater unemployment rates and those with greater cuts in welfare spending by local authorities. The authors also emphasise the limitations of the Trussell Trust data by admitting that “food bank referrals are not always easy to obtain and, even now, provision is patchy”, echoing previously discussed calls for more robust standardised measurement of food insecurity at a population level. Discussing some of these controversies and limitations surrounding the Trussell Trust data, Garratt (2015, p. 9) has pointed out that widely reported numbers of food parcels being given out do “not distinguish between independent and repeat visits”. Similar data from other food aid providers is not available and

Garratt (2015) further points to the issue of 'hidden hunger' where those affected by food poverty do not access services due to embarrassment, unavailability or other access-related issues. Loopstra et al. (2018) specifically explore the role of benefit sanction as a 'driver' for increased food bank use in the UK to show that the "rate of adults fed by food banks rose by an additional 3.36 adults per 100,000 (95% CI:1.71 to 5.01) as the rate of sanctioning increased by 10 per 100,000 adults". Across different regions, sanctioning rates were indeed positively correlated with food bank use ( $r=0.26$ ;  $p<0.0001$ ). The authors then point out the need for more longitudinal data for a better understanding of systemic links between sanctioning and food bank use, since recent drops in sanctioning rates have not been reflected in reduced food bank figures. This further shows the limitations of the Trussell Trust data, as they only indicate current provision rather than demand where food banks leaving the franchise no longer report their usage data. Identical to previous studies, Loopstra et al. (2018, p. 454) support calls for standardised measurement of food insecurity through national surveys.

In a study co-commissioned by the Trussell Trust, Perry, Williams, Sefton, and Haddad (2014) combined referral and other administrative data on food bank use with 40 in-depth interviews with 'clients' to explore the reasons for their referral. The predominant reason identified was some form of "immediate income crisis", caused by either loss of earnings from employment, change in family circumstances, sudden homelessness or benefit problems and sanctions. Sanctions alone accounted for between 20 and 30% of referrals in those areas where in-depth data was collected. Notably, the authors highlight the positive feedback by clients praising "the warmth of welcome they received there, the opportunity to talk, and its signposting to other support services" (Perry et al., 2014, p. 12) without any mention of negative experiences or critiques of the food banks and quality of food provision. The report then lays out a series of recommendations intended to prevent people from using food banks through modest reforms to the benefit system said to prevent future crises, without ever questioning the supposed inevitability of 'shocks' along with structural forces. By merely demanding "an efficient and supportive service for all clients" (Perry et al., 2014, p. 13) by Jobcentres and a "reform" to

sanctioning policies and practices, the report adopts a marketised language of service delivery to demand better responses to existing needs, without challenging how these needs are created in the first place. In a 2017 update to the report (Haddad, Perry, & Hadfield-Spoor, 2017), again co-commissioned by the Trussell Trust, the authors build on previous recommendations to demand making “job centres efficient and supportive” along with expansion of advice and support services stating that “independent advisers co-located in foodbanks would make the most difference in reducing foodbank referral numbers”. More funding, better links between food bank and advice services and increased efforts to signpost ‘clients’ onto other services are then presented as ‘upstream’ solutions to poverty.

Focusing on the impacts of universal credit rollout, another report by the Trussell Trust (Jitendra, Thorogood, & Thorogood, 2018, p. 3) documents the impact of waiting for the initial payment under the new system where “70% of respondents found themselves in debt, 57% experienced issues with their mental or physical health, and 56% experienced housing issues”. Problematising only a lack of support and inadequate administration of claims, the report then advocates reforms to universal credit combined with more “personal budgeting advice and IT support”, debt advice and provision of free childcare. Calls for more financial support remain equally limited to calls for restoring benefits to pre-austerity levels. Regarding sanctions, the Trussell Trust even advocates a “yellow-card warning system” without ever challenging sanctions in principle. Haddad et al. (2017, p. 39) equally endorse expansion of advice services where “ideally, people should be seeing advisers before they go to the food bank”, demonstrating the growing links between a new welfare industry and food charities (Selke, 2013).

### ***Constructions of risk and vulnerability in health research***

The following body of research presents another specialisation in scientific discourse towards identifying specific risk factors associated with food poverty among selected target groups. The main questions within this literature are concerned not only with *why* people use food banks but *who* is using food banks. Consequently, both quantitative measurement of client groups

and qualitative explorations of individual experiences form new categories based on scientific expertise in which ‘clients’ are profiled as ‘vulnerable’ and at-risk groups.

In what has been hailed as ‘ground-breaking’ research by the Trussell Trust, who also co-funded and commissioned the study, Loopstra and Lalor (2017) document and profile food bank users based on survey data collected by volunteers from clients who had already been referred to a food bank. The study (Loopstra & Lalor, 2017, p. 11) sets out to describe “the socio-demographic and economic profile of people receiving food parcels” but by restricting data collection to self-completion of survey items by current clients, results necessarily reflect the rationales of the referral regime, while those deemed ineligible and denied a voucher remain absent non-clients. Results are therefore hardly surprising and show that those worthy poor in visible need, including single parents with children, are more likely to be referred in the first place. The authors, however, interpret over-representation of these groups as increased vulnerability for needing a food bank where they create user profiles claiming the “most common household type using food banks were single male households (39%), followed by lone mothers with children (13%) and then single females (12%)”, while 64% of respondents had a health condition with one-third of households affected by a mental health condition and 50% with a disability. Loopstra & Lalor (2017, p. 48) then provide detailed reports on clients’ socio-economic characteristics, food insecurity status and benefits use to conclude that “households referred to food banks are an extremely vulnerable population” without accounting for how this vulnerability is socially produced and discursively assigned. The authors finally construct food poverty as “a serious public health concern” requiring better national monitoring along with “upstream interventions” addressing people’s “underlying” problems in line with other reports discussed above. Characteristically for such reports commissioned by the Trussell Trust, the authors do not scrutinise any of the food bank practices, nor did the questionnaire include any questions regarding quality of ‘emergency’ food provided, its appropriateness and volume, nor did it invite responses regarding user interaction with volunteers and experiences obtaining food through the referral system.

Presenting an example of well marketed and funded research firmly located within a positivistic research paradigm, the report claims to reveal realities of poverty, when it in fact actively creates new categories of vulnerability and cases of ‘typical’ users while ignoring the exclusionary practices of the referral regime. The ways in which risks and vulnerabilities are identified and problematised across food bank practices in close collaboration with expert agencies then warrants critical engagement through independent research.

In the absence of population-wide national data on the prevalence of food insecurity, Smith, Thompson, Harland, Parker, and Shelton (2018, p. 26) draw on demographic profiles, census data and databases by the DWP to estimate that the “total population at highest risk of household food insecurity from the 2011 Census was estimated to be 9,074,700 or 17.4% of the total population”. Combining various risk factors, including childhood obesity and regional food bank concentration, they then provide maps of risk areas by household type to recommend incorporating the model into primary care settings and even propose the inclusion of A&E attendance figures and screening of GP databases for increased monitoring of ‘vulnerable’ groups based on identified risk factors. Their visual model is said to provide local authorities and charities with new ways “to assess local risk and plan appropriate interventions” (Smith et al., 2018, p. 29), thereby reducing poverty to a measurable and preventable risk factor amenable to local health interventions. Estimating a much lower number of food bank user at 850,000 people between 2013 and 2015, Garratt (2017) found that an increasing number of visits was made by one-person households with overall usage figures also varying by demographic characteristics. While Garratt (2017) does not explore the nutritional value of emergency food provision itself, she too encourages GPs to keep monitoring “vulnerable patients” after referring them to food banks. Rather than a political problem demanding political solutions, this type of research makes poverty into a health issue and calls for better measurement, marketable innovation and better data collection for expert interventions in collaboration with academic researchers and health professionals.

In a similar exercise in profiling food bank users, Prayogo et al. (2017, p. 3) state that “more than half of foodbank users were women (55.9%), classified as of lower educational attainment (51.9%), single (63.6%), living in local authority or housing association accommodation (62.2%), and currently receiving benefits (64.8%)” partly supporting Loopstra & Lalor’s (2017) profile of the ‘typical’ food bank user. Similar to Trussell Trust figures discussed above, benefit delays (31.9%) and changes (11.1%), low-income (19.6%) and unemployment (11.1%) were found to be the main referral reasons. In addition to supporting calls for more systematic national monitoring, the authors criticise that not all food insecure individuals are currently referred to food banks and consequently demand more effective methods for identifying at-risk individuals and referral to food banks. What these studies in public health problematise is therefore a technical lack of measurement, ineffective monitoring and referral practices, insufficient charitable provision and professional networks.

### ***A new science of food poverty?***

There is indeed a growing body of health research linking food insecurity with a series of poor health outcomes as a basis for public policy programmes and informed health interventions. Mendly-Zambo and Raphael (2018) refer to these perspectives as pluralist in their ambition to advocate for changes in government policy whereby research on food insecurity and reporting on adverse health impacts is seen as collaborative work to influence policy. As they rightly point out, this dominant advocacy approach across social policy and health research falsely assumes that all voices and research outputs carry equal value, thus ignoring the effects of political ideologies, economic interests and power imbalances. In contrast, this discussion has shown how the fixation on better measurement and more rigorous data collection for optimising health interventions makes food poverty into a naturalistic phenomenon for scientific study. The positivistic attempts to establish causal patterns between food bank growth and policy changes proved to be heavily reliant on referral and usage data by the Trussell Trust without any fundamental critique of the referral regime, its underlying assumptions or how it may produce new vulnerabilities and count only the ‘worthy’ poor.



Meanwhile, food bank practices and charities' own knowledge production remain unscrutinised without any direct consultation of 'clients' on their needs, priorities or experiences of charitable aid. On-going specialisation designed to identify new 'vulnerable' and at-risk groups was further shown to drive the collection of personal data through health services which effectively medicalises and hence depoliticises food poverty (Mendly-Zambo & Raphael, 2018) by making it into a matter of nutrition and personal health. Characteristic for this medicalisation within health and policy research is also the emphasis on individual risk factors, again requiring specialised measurement and expertise, along with encouraging behavioural modification to achieve better health outcomes. The overarching concern with risk management has been argued to create new ways "of isolating, dividing and targeting populations in terms of their risk factors" (Dean, 1995, p. 580) to prepare individualised interventions and shift attention from structural causes and political responsibilities for creating material conditions of poverty. For Rose (2001b), such government of risk is characteristic of neoliberal health policies which draw on scientific expertise seeking to identify and manage specific risk groups in order to intervene and promote healthy lifestyles. Before asking who may benefit from this expert management of risk and expansion of charitable provision, the following section now turns to studies exploring the lived realities and interactions within food banks.

## **The other side of food banking: Spaces of stigma, shame and lived austerity**

This section provides an overview of food bank ethnographies offering an insider perspective into experiences of food poverty and stigmatisation. In contrast to dominant health and policy research, these qualitative studies are much more concerned with the 'dark side' of food banking but in maintaining a negative conception of power as stigmatising and excluding, they will be shown to stop short of a necessary critique of food bank spaces and practices.

In their ethnographic study of 15 food banks around Toronto, Tarasuk and Eakin (2003) found that food supplies were highly limited and variable with the quality of food remaining outside of volunteers' control. Taking a rare critical perspective, both observed how the amount of food and selection was carefully controlled and supervised by volunteers, while clients were expected to learn and comply with internal rules and procedures. Food bank users were expected to graciously accept any food gifts where visible displays of gratitude were central to internal routines and its absence would evoke reactions of suspicion and distrust. Overall food distribution was "disassociated from client need" (Tarasuk & Eakin, 2003, p. 1511) to become "essentially a symbolic gesture". Their symbolic interactionist perspective therefore offers valuable insights into the often-neglected institutional rituals inside food banks. Presenting similar findings from food banks in Belgium, Ghys (2018) too encourages a focus on the internal power relations which typically deny any participation by recipients, while putting volunteers in positions of authority over food selection and eligibility. Forced gratitude and negative feelings of shame and stigma were widely expressed by clients, although sometimes these appeared to wear off after repeat visits. Discussing this 'dark side' of food banks by drawing on examples from the Netherlands, van der Horst, Pascucci, and Bol (2014) argue that shame and stigma are outcomes of unequal positions and interpersonal negotiation of status between giver and recipient. Demanding a focus on interaction and power relationships, they show how volunteers had clear expectations for client conduct and gratitude where any complaints were interpreted as lack of genuine need.

In the UK, Garthwaite (2016a, 2016b) has extensively documented similar experiences in her ethnographic observations and interviews inside food banks highlighting the fear, shame and embarrassment among clients who delayed turning to charitable aid for as long as possible. Notably, she argues that the stigma felt by clients did not arise from their actual experience inside the food bank but from a wider stigmatising culture of 'othering' and 'poverty porn' which constructs poverty as personal failure. Based on extensive interviews in the UK, Lambie-Mumford (2017) locates this stigma in food charity as a distinctly 'other' system seen as

socially unacceptable compared to having choice and agency as consumer within a market. Exclusion and feelings of 'otherness' may then be further reinforced through the material location within churches and 'othering' of the poor as passive recipients in need of food. In his extensive ethnographic observations at German food banks, Selke (2013) describes how these become a symbol of a downward social movement and public sign of individual failures, illustrated by users' sudden realisation of failure and reliance on charity when standing outside the building. Selke (2013) shows how these experiences change people's self-image, with inhibitions and fears only being overcome over time and by drawing on the narrative of temporary help. In contrast to the UK authors, he does extend stigmatising effects to internal routines with constant suspicion and need for users to prove their eligibility. Supporting Tarasuk and Eakin's (2003) findings from Canada, Selke (2013) shows how food banks as institutions become stages with their own rules, with the first rule of visibly showing gratitude by smiling at the right time to gain approval and sympathy of volunteers at the expense of users' humility and self-esteem. In order to alleviate these anticipated feelings and inhibitions to enter the food bank, Garthwaite (2016b, p. 282) describes extensive efforts by volunteers to create a "non-judgemental and relaxed atmosphere" through a café-style environment.

There is considerable overlap here with Purdam et al's. (2015) documentation of the same 'hidden costs' in clients' fear of being seen using the food bank and failure to provide for their families. While clients only came as a last resort after initial hesitation, on the other hand, some clients appreciated the welcoming approach by volunteers and enjoyed a temporary escape from isolation. These findings raise an important gap in research while also highlighting the limitations of focusing solely on the shaming and stigmatisation of clients: The 'welcoming' atmosphere at UK food banks<sup>1</sup> then appears to create quite different spatial and interactional dynamics from the formal welfare system offered as more inclusive in direct response to a culture of stigma. Such idealisations based on positive client feedback are potentially dangerous here, since they divert attention from existing power relationships

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<sup>1</sup> The Trussell Trust (2018e) website promises all potential visitors a "warm welcome into a safe environment, a listening ear from trained volunteers and a food parcel".

between giver and recipient. On the contrary, the spatial design and construction of 'welcoming' spaces then deserves extra attention: What kind of social space is being created here and how does the material environment impact on interactions inside the food bank? How do volunteers welcome their clients and what is the power relationship between host and guest? Finally, how are clients' problems constructed by volunteers and what solutions are being offered? Another crucial limitation in this ethnographic research is that writers like Garthwaite (2016b, p. 285) consider only the impact of "powerful political, media and public discourse" on stigma and constructions of worthiness without consideration for the discourses at work inside the food bank. Any discursive analysis should therefore extend beyond negative emotions and media narratives to explore how clients are being positioned and acted upon through volunteers' language use as well as institutional practices within the food bank. This is where realist insider accounts lack any reflexive awareness of the discursive dynamics and researchers' own role in potentially reinforcing norms and placing expectations for worthy conduct on clients.

Finally, this section now turns to critical contributions from human geography which highlight some of the spatial aspects of food banks as contradictory places where austerity comes to be localised. Discussing available critiques of the UK food bank system, Williams, Cloke, May, and Goodwin (2016) note that the existing literature tends to overlook both independent food banks, which often differ from the Trussell franchise in their practices and degree of political activism, and also neglects the role of food charities in rural regions. Based on interviews and observations from their own case study, the authors challenge the dominant narrative of depoliticisation, which sees food charities as a distraction or welcome by-product of neoliberal welfare reform: Volunteering was in fact seen as highly ambiguous activity characterised by diverse moral and political positions where attitudes and identities were transformed and negotiated within the setting, largely through dialogue and interaction with clients. Whereas most research assumes these positions to be static, the authors show that these are constantly being transformed within the 'melting pot' of the food bank, referring to examples of both

progressive and conservative responses to clients' stories. Far from being depoliticised, some volunteers then demonstrated a growing desire for social justice and supported local campaigns against austerity. Adopting a similarly grounded approach, Strong (2018) points also to the localised responsibility and spatial politics of austerity in the context of food banks which further move responsibility away from the state, but also offer new affective spaces for contesting feelings of shame and stigma through their welcoming atmosphere and embodiment of care. There is a danger here of idealising food banks as potential places of either resistance and political transformation – what Cloke, May, and Williams (2017) celebrate as promising new space of care – or offering temporary escape from the world of austerity. Nevertheless, these contributions still show the value of adopting a more grounded approach which acknowledges local complexity and diversity while avoiding universal categorisations and easy dismissals of agency. A discursive approach would go even further and explore through detailed analysis the positioning and active negotiation of austerity discourses, available norms and potential for political action. Much more attention should also be paid to moral-political transformations at the level of subjectivity and the material design of food bank spaces.

In summary, ethnographies of food bank spaces have shown a much 'darker' side of food banking with some indication of unequal power relationships where analysis remains focused on stigma, shaming and lack of agency. There is clear value in investigating interactions and emerging power relationships within these settings; yet existing research has so far ignored the discursive encounters between actors and effects of spatial designs and rituals which, despite promising a friendly welcome, may in fact disguise power imbalances. Across the cited studies, power was understood strictly in a negative sense as silencing, shaming, stigmatising and embarrassing users. Frequent references to 'hidden' costs of food banking across different countries reinforce this notion of something being taken away, as clients are restricted in their agency and food choice compared to the market system. In his critique of the repressive hypothesis of power, Foucault below demonstrates how this limited understanding of power

is based on a purely economistic conception as something negative and destructive, or to be given and taken away:

*“We must cease once and for all to describe the effects of power in negative terms: it ‘excludes’, it ‘represses’, it ‘censors’, it ‘abstracts’, it ‘masks’, it ‘conceals’. In fact, power produces; it produces reality; it produces domains of objects and rituals of truth. The individual and the knowledge that may be gained of him belong to this production.”*

*(Foucault, 1995, p. 194)*

Food bank researchers keep trying to counter this repressive power by speaking the truth of poverty and documenting clients’ real stories with direct insights and thereby overcome the “ban on truth” (Dreyfus & Rabinow, 1983, p. 129) by offering a seemingly liberating voice while locating themselves outside of power. The fallacy of the repressive hypothesis lies in its ignorance for the productive forms of discourses, their subjectifying effects and the active construction of reality in which charities play a key role: By focusing solely on stigma, disempowerment and absence of agency and choice, researchers like Lambie-Mumford (2017) discuss institutional mechanisms of eligibility checks, referral practices and accessibility only in terms of restraint in comparison to the norm of free-market access without considering the positive power effects for the shaping of clients’ conduct. The blindness towards the power exercised through these practices may explain the persistent uncritical endorsement of signposting services which remain either overlooked or even endorsed as add-on services of kind help in new spaces of care (see Lambie-Mumford, 2017; Riches, 2018; Williams et al., 2016). This is where this study will scrutinise and make visible the effects of new support services, disciplinary regimes and work with advice agencies before linking these to the production of new subjectivities. I will return to the importance of adopting a Foucauldian understanding of power in later discussions of the Right to Food approach.

## **Corporate food aid and the institutionalisation of food charity**

Given the long history of food charity in countries like Canada, Germany and the US, it is perhaps not surprising that critical reflections on the effects of institutionalisation within the literature also overwhelmingly originate in these countries. Riches (2018) directly links the emergence of ‘food bank nations’ in OECD countries to a corporate capture by ‘Big Philanthropy’ introducing business structures and principles to benefit from the moral imperative of feeding the needy. This is despite adopting a language of solidarity with the poor where solutions using ‘surplus food’ improve corporate social responsibility and offer tax incentives, rather than advance agendas for social change and justice. Even in his refreshing polemic, however, Riches (2018) maintains a focus on inadequacy, effectiveness, political responsibility and inability to meet growing demands. By reducing food charity to a safety net for state welfare, he stops short of including charity practices in his critique, which he instead directs exclusively at an ‘indifferent’ state failing its responsibilities.

Although Livingstone’s (2015, 2017) critical commentaries remain equally state-centred, she goes further in her critique of government discourse as “one of subordination, alienation and dispossession” (Livingstone, 2017, p. 193) and which reproduces inequality as well as capital. Denouncing franchised food charity as “fetishized commodity” and institutionalised extension of the welfare state, she issues a rare Marxist critique directed at ‘paradoxical’ food banks and their aspiration to franchise the disenfranchised. More interested in the social relations driving food bank growth than singular causal factors, Livingstone (2017) directly locates their function in supporting the capitalist state and perpetuating inequality, rather than aiming for transformative change. As refreshing as her critical commentary is, it remains a distanced polemic targeting only repressive forms of state power without the benefit of precise examples or empirical data in support of her argument, which then takes the form of a totalising discourse rejecting charity on purely normative grounds. The reduction of food banks as “an extension of the welfare state” (Livingstone, 2017, p. 115) shows the deficit of state-centred critiques which impose universal assumptions about their function, whereas Williams et al.

(2016) have demonstrated these spaces to be contested, contradictory and requiring a more grounded analysis. Despite providing a valuable and theoretically rich critique, Livingstone (2017) appears to consider food banks only as expressions of existing social relations and spatial representations of capitalist divisions. Discursive and material production and subjectification inside food banks are ignored by her dominant focus on representations and state forms along with the constitution of 'crises' by the food charities themselves. In contrast, as Triantafillou (2012, p. 27) shows, Foucault's nominalist approach allows focusing instead "on the performative dimension of certain forms of concepts, theories and wider bodies of knowledge": It is therefore not about the true meaning or function of charity, nor is it about whether charity is an adequate solution or disguised form of state control. Rather, nominalist analysis (Hansen, 2014) would seek to identify and map out the different, possibly conflicting and unexpected ways food poverty is problematised and made governable in local settings to allow innovation and 'otherness' to become imaginable and realisable. For example, Livingstone (2017) and others mainly question the adequacy of charitable responses to (temporary) crises, without challenging the discursive construction of crisis as a concept and its power effects. Given the medical history of crisis as a concept (Cordero, 2016), its application should not be taken for granted but reconstructed, as it provides a key rationale for various interventions, most of which are neither initiated nor directed by the state. This would require a more grounded tracing of the dominant problematisations of crisis across food bank services open to contradictions, multiple positionings and non-neoliberal rationalities and practices.

In Germany, Selke (2008, 2013, 2017) has located food banks within a new 'economy of poverty' relying mainly on support by private sponsors for their infrastructure and food donations. While hiding the real extent of poverty, food banks become a surrogate for political change and thus make the poor into welcome 'substitute-consumers' for constantly expanding services and goods, for example budget cook books, specifically tailored to this new target group. Drawing on Bourdieu's work on symbolic capital, Selke (2017) explores how food



banks, and other businesses, profit directly and indirectly from poverty by adopting and putting into practice economic rationalities of the market. Importantly, he shows that volunteers are among the beneficiaries in their self-realisation as efficient and useful helpers receiving gratitude from clients and praise and symbolic recognition from politicians and the public. Challenging the dominant narrative of charity merely filling a gap, its on-going expansion and institutionalisation is then better explained by the uncritical adoption of economic logics of growth, specialisation and professionalisation. In return for receiving corporate donations and logistical support, food banks offer new marketing and PR opportunities to global companies.

These corporate partnerships appear crucial to the observed economic stabilisation and institutionalisation but have so far remain unexplored in a UK context. Although Dowler and Lambie-Mumford (2015a, p. 424) briefly hint at the ways charitable provision allows UK “food businesses to gain from improving corporate social responsibility and reduced landfill taxes”, they remain confined to the hypothesis of state retreat from welfare responsibilities without considering the active role of charities or how they are imitating business principles in their practice. By contrast, in *Big Hunger*, Fisher (2017) has unpicked and scrutinised these links between anti-hunger groups, food banks and big businesses in the US to show how an expanding ‘Hunger Industrial Complex’ perpetuates low wages and inequality, while offering new corporate opportunities through ‘cause marketing’ and image campaigns. These two contributions are crucial to understanding the institutionalisation of food charity in the UK and are, at least partially, picked up by Caplan (2016, p. 5) in her attempt at an “anthropology of food poverty” which asks “who benefits and why from corporate food charity?”. Although she highlights cooperative partnerships with big supermarket chains and potential benefits to their corporate image by installing food collection bins in stores, she does not provide a detailed analysis of these collection practices and accompanying discourses. Here, more critical research is needed especially into recent trends of ‘neighbourhood food collections’ at UK supermarkets and the visibilities they produce with their highly branded truth claims and

positionings of volunteers and interaction with donors. Much like Tarasuk and Eakin (2003), Caplan (2016, p. 7) does diagnose in volunteers “some degree of authority and/or expertise who are in a position to evaluate eligibility” but stops short of considering the precise nature of these emerging power relationships. Like Selke (2017), Caplan (2016, p. 8) also highlights benefits and rewards to volunteers as “a way of giving meaning and agency to a life”, while charities had predominantly ‘absorbed’ messages of austerity without openly challenging neoliberal discourses. This clearly warrants further exploration of how charities are adopting or negotiating these discourses to speak about possible solutions and construct their own narratives in everyday practices.

In her highly influential critique of food charity in the US, Poppendieck (1998, p. 159) had already drawn attention to similar economic benefits making food charity “extraordinarily useful to business” in donations of material equipment, tax deductions and savings in storage costs for large corporations and private individuals, improvement of employee moral and image of good ‘corporate citizenship’. Her work also emphasises the symbolic value of food donations over cash gifts where food is given ritual significance in public displays, decorations and food drives by institutions. Publicly visible donations then act as a “moral safety valve” for the “survivor guilt of the affluent” Poppendieck (1998, p. 198) through which donors are offered a symbolic ‘antidote’ for their self-indulgent consumerism. Although Poppendieck’s work (1998) is widely cited by food poverty researchers in the UK, these key aspects behind institutionalisation and questions surrounding benefits and motivations for donating and volunteering have so far been neglected. Specifically, Poppendieck (1998, p. 27) provides detailed descriptions of the media publicity and images of food drives and fund-raisers which offer public re-assurance and collective illusion of effective community action in the face of growing evidence of poverty and deprivation. The use of images and public displays of food charity raises further issues of how collection events and supporting media are purposefully used to evoke this emotional gratification and what discourses are at work in mobilising public food donations. In a UK context with its much more recent emergence of institutional food

charity, annual Neighbourhood Food Collections organised by the Trussell Trust and Tesco supermarkets nationwide provide excellent opportunities for filling this gap in research by exploring the visibilities, positionings and material and symbolic benefits gained from the events.

## **Limits to critique and the Right to Food**

So far, recommendations and potential for change in existing research centred around increased monitoring and a national measurement of food insecurity, combined with calls for moderate welfare reform and restoring benefit levels to pre-austerity levels. This limited scope of critiques was also found by McIntyre, Tougas, Rondeau, and Mah (2016) in their review of food bank critiques which synthesised available action recommendations across 33 studies, of which 17 recommended improvements to food banks, 14 proposed alleviating or eliminating poverty and 2 combined recommendations for both. Across the reviewed studies, authors focused on operational aspects within food banks, mostly around inadequate or unstable food supplies, while not a single study was explicitly concerned with the root causes and structural determinants of food bank use. While the discussed papers in this review demonstrate a similar critical and theoretical deficit, with some notable exceptions highlighted in the previous section, there also appears to be a reluctance to engage more critically with the internal routines and power dynamics at UK food banks. Mendly-Zambo and Raphael (2018) draw a similar picture of the academic and public discourse on food insecurity in Canada in their critique of naïve policy research and advocacy which ignores power structures and corporate influence in the production of knowledge. Moving away from internal critiques, they show food banks to be instrumental in maintaining the larger economic system and advocate much broader political and social action centred around fair distribution of resources based on the need to “combat the power of the corporate and business sector” (Mendly-Zambo & Raphael, 2018, p. 14) by strengthening unions and political parties on the left. Their critical analysis of the dominant discourses in Canadian food insecurity research presents a valuable

contribution, demonstrating the benefits of considering wider issues of systemic inequality and vested power interests, as well as the critical potential in discursive methodologies.

This section now turns to related debates around the Right to Food (RTF) approach which is increasingly being advocated by leading scholars and activists as a solution to both food poverty and institutionalisation of charitable aid. Despite its attraction as an immediate remedy and return to state welfare, I will argue that the RTF approach becomes a bottleneck for critique trapped within a rights-based discourse which ignores the workings of neoliberal government and its shift from collective rights to individual norms. Moreover, it demonstrates the potential dangers of critique which, despite claiming to be emancipatory, can become depoliticising as it is itself institutionalised (Hansen, 2014) and integrated into new techniques of governing poverty.

International academic debates on hunger in so called ‘developed’ countries have been heavily influenced by policy debates around the human right to food (RTF) (Lambie-Mumford, 2018; Riches, 2002, 2011, 2018; Riches & Silvasti, 2014). Following a critique of neoliberal austerity policies across different countries, said to result in a decline in public spending and state retreat from public services, an alternative ‘liberating’ discourse is frequently advocated by many leading UK-based researchers (see Dowler, 2014; Lambie-Mumford, 2014). Guiding policy changes and charity practices based on international legal frameworks, in particular the UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (CESCR), these emphasise the importance of adequacy and sustainability of food access and place the state in a position of obligation to meet these standards. Lambie-Mumford (2014; 2017) then demonstrates how the current UK system of emergency food provision, based on a national network of food banks, falls short of the obligations of sustainability and social acceptability as it forms a distinctly ‘other’ system of food provision outside of widely acceptable markets. While charity-based provision remains problematic and essentially opposed to the RTF principle, the state is identified as ‘duty-bearer’ in the achievement of a universal right to food, which already signals the state-centred nature of this narrative.

Riches (2011, p. 774) is another major proponent of an alternative legal framework in his commentaries on the Canadian food charity system and while he convincingly argues that mere “compassion is insufficient without social justice” in another normative rejection of charity, arguably so is merely changing the discourse from charitable help to rightful entitlement without critical analysis of how the charitable regime has come into existence. There can be no challenge to how food aid “has become the norm and is now publicly accepted” (Riches, 2011, pp. 771–772) without critical analysis of the knowledge producing activities by charities themselves and accounting for how their practices are informed by dominant norms. Applying these debates to a UK context, Caraher and Furey (2018) see another promise in the RTF in giving a liberating voice to food bank ‘clients’ where it is the state’s role to protect individuals’ rights where “policy advocates, champions and entrepreneurs” work together in solving poverty. This civil society discourse shows the insistence on naïve pluralism in food poverty research which falsely suggests an equal playing field among interest groups while obscuring the workings of powerful discourses. Moreover, the collaborative rallying behind RTF under the promise of liberation shows it to be an empowerment discourse based on a humanistic conception of freedom as an original state to be owned by liberal subjects and protected by the state (Simons, 1995).

These perspectives leave little regard for the active role of charities beyond being a symbol for a retreating state and consistently maintain a realist perspective suspecting an underlying “real function” and “hidden functions” (Riches, 2011, p. 772) of charity to deflect from causal structures and ethical problems like stigmatisation. Elsewhere, the RTF has been employed as analytical perspective (Lambie-Mumford, 2017, p. 73) with central concerns for the “lack of choice, vulnerability, neediness and otherness of the experience” around food banks as failures to provide minimum standards. Yet again, this negative conception of power has no regard for active processes which create new solutions, moral guidelines and normative expectations across food bank services. Indeed, the RTF further fixates debates on roles and responsibilities of the state (see Purdam et al., 2015) in protecting rights of ‘vulnerable’ citizens without

acknowledging how vulnerabilities are discursively constructed and how community groups and charities are actively involved in the governmentalisation of poverty through programmes promising their own empowerment (Cruikshank, 1999).

Mendly-Zambo & Raphael (2018) are openly dismissive of the RTF as providing merely a moral imperative to act without addressing causes or providing tools to address the problem. This is illustrated by Caraher and Furey's (2018) outspoken support for the RTF, where they indeed want to leave precise actions and legal realisation to 'experts', while their overall ambition remains limited to curtailing the growth of more food banks, declaring that "charitable food assistance can serve a critical, short-term need" (Caraher and Furey, 2018, p. 41). In failing to pose a fundamental challenge to power dynamics and social-economic conditions, the RTF then presents a convenient discourse offering a moral position for researchers to rally behind and from which to condemn food poverty and perceived injustices without having to engage critically with structural causes, the roles of charities in governing poverty or the effects of their own knowledge production. Its rights-based discourse operates through existing institutions and does not entail any social or political transformation, as it problematises only the provision of an arbitrary standard under state guarantee. I am arguing that this limited critical potential in the RTF approach is due to its fixation on sovereign state power and the rights-based liberal subject. Contributions in governmentality studies (Dean, 2010; Rose & Miller, 2010) based on Foucault's rejection of juridical accounts of power and the universal knowing subject have redefined governmental power as a discursive field of rationalisations and strategies for targeting problems and proposing solutions. Below, Lemke (2007, p. 45) outlines the critical potential of an analysis of neoliberal governmentality which helps overcome the misleading divisions between private and state actors:

*"An analytics of government helps to provide a dynamic analysis that does not limit itself to statements about the 'retreat of the state' or the 'domination of the market', but deciphers the apparent 'end of politics' as a political program. As many scholars have noted, the critique of direct*

*state interventions is a positive technique of government which entails a transfer of the operations of government to non-state actors. As a result, current political changes are understood not as a decline of state sovereignty but as a promotion of forms of government that foster and enforce individual responsibility, privatized risk-management, empowerment techniques, and the play of market forces and entrepreneurial models in a variety of social domains.”*

The discursive shifts from state-centred social policies to market-based neoliberal projects, like replacing rights-based collective welfare with means-tested charitable provision, is then not interpreted as negative withdrawal by state forces but as the active promotion of *more* government at a distance, requiring new techniques and enrolling seemingly unpolitical organisations (see also Dean, 2007; Rose, 2006). What is needed, consequently, is an analysis that avoids expressions of ideal solutions to the ‘end of politics’ with promises of liberation of an inner essence where researchers must recognise not only that power and truth/knowledge are not external to one another (Dreyfus & Rabinow, 1983) but also that they themselves are deeply involved in these games of truth rather than offering an empowering voice from the outside. For Foucault, this conceptual appeal of repressive power is indeed due to a ‘speaker’s benefit’ and the positioning of the ‘universal’ intellectual as “master of truth and justice” (Foucault, 2002e, p. 126) firmly “outside of power but within the truth” (Dreyfus & Rabinow, 1983, p. 130): This makes promises of immediate change and a better life through legal realisation of a state-backed universal right to food both “pleasurable to pronounce and easy to accept”, while remaining silent on the forces which create and profit from poverty. Rather than a change in consciousness, here from charity to the universality of entitlement, for Foucault (2002f, p. 133) “the political question, to sum up, is not error, illusion, alienated consciousness, or ideology; it is truth itself” and its regime of production, in which both academics and food charities have been shown to play major roles. In this context, Foucault’s (2002a, p. 288) refusal to act as prophesising “prescriber of solutions” seems very sensible indeed since doing so “can only contribute to the functioning of a particular power situation”

which must instead be contested and shown as historical outcome, even if policy-oriented research seeking immediate solutions may yield institutional and career benefits.

Overall then, austerity policies and charitable responses should be interrogated not as simple withdrawal from state services but as "displacement from formal to informal techniques of government and the appearance of new actors on the scene of government" (Lemke, 2007, p. 57) which requires critical examination of how food charities as new actors problematise poverty and come to be involved in governing food poverty through various interventions. Foucault proposes that "rather than deriving powers from sovereignty, we should be extracting operators of domination from relations of power, both historically and empirically" (Foucault, 2003b, p. 45) requiring a closer examination of the power relations in food bank settings and their role in producing subjects of charity. Consequently, the RTF framework, although attracting many researchers with its promise as immediate remedy, cannot function as analytical tool; it cannot analyse itself from within the same discourse of sovereignty and law. It imposes an a priori solution by voices of authority and ultimate justice while sidestepping the power dynamics enacted by a growing food bank regime and its corporate and academic partners. It avoids questioning how a shift from welfare right to charitable gift has occurred in the first place and how food charity practices are intimately involved in the production of food poverty as a 'phenomenon' to be measured and solved. Only by dispensing with the notion of sovereign power over a static legal subject, to be equipped with universal rights by the state, can an analysis be attempted of how 'clients' and volunteers emerge as subjects of charity and objects of power. In the next section, I will propose further steps and criteria for a critical discursive approach which challenges existing food poverty research and locates it within a larger power-knowledge regime.

## **Food poverty research as discursive capital**

This review has shown food poverty research to be dominated by an empiricism mainly concerned with measuring and explaining the phenomenon through evidence collection in



realist and positivist methodologies. Frequent promises to give a voice to the excluded poor were shown to ignore researchers' own role in knowledge production and the power effects in producing new subjectivities of risky behaviour and vulnerable positions. These trends were also reflected by an ESRC-funded conference in 2018 (ENUF, 2018) organised by Loopstra and Lambie-Mumford with the aim "to make facts, figures and evidence on household food insecurity easily accessible for researchers, policy makers and civil society organisations" and foster collaboration between them. As the first national conference of its kind, the emphasis on collection and dissemination of empirical 'facts' along with a special panel on "targeted interventions" by a network of self-declared UK experts together with representatives from the largest food charities is illustrative of the current research landscape. These developments are situated within a scientific paradigm which claims to produce objective knowledge of poverty to inform policy, but ignores institutional interests, material benefits and power imbalances. However, this raises important ethical and political questions about the role and value of academic research in a market environment where "lackey intellectuals provide justifications for neo-liberal policies by dressing them up as scientific, progressive and even inevitable" (Stabile & Morooka, 2003, p. 329). As McIntyre et al. (2016, p. 856) show in their qualitative synthesis of food bank critiques, many of these limitations and failures to extend critiques beyond operational aspects are due to the range of research questions asked which reflect the interests of granting agencies who tend to fund projects which are "more likely to produce results that are easily measured and put into practice" through improvement and more 'actionable' measures rather than radical transformation which challenges powerful structures.

As I have tried to illustrate, the same tendency was seen within the expanding body of scientific food bank research in the UK which is driven by specialisation, methodological innovation and providing useful data to inform charities and policy-makers. What is perhaps most worrying here is the growing influence and dominance of the Trussell Trust as a major funding body for research and gatekeeper of access and data where studies remain wilfully ignorant towards

any critiques of food bank practices, the authority of volunteers or the voices and needs of clients beyond instrumentalised case studies testifying to the life-saving power and kindness received. Little attention has been paid to how academic outputs are put to use by the Trussell Trust as marketing tools to apply for funding, campaign for donations or recruit volunteers, and as ways to counter any critical voices by pointing to expert documentations of ‘impact’. This research landscape is driven on one hand by the demands for useful academic outputs and pressures in a marketised Higher Education sector, and the need for instrumental knowledge informing and sustaining charity practices on the other. This tendency is intensified by the naïve empiricism across both realist and positivistic attempts to collect evidence for informing policy, ignoring their own role in the discursive production of the phenomenon itself.

While Andy Fisher (2017) has made an important contribution to debates around corporate profiteering in the Hunger Industrial Complex, little attention has been paid to the role of academics and the value of evidence generated through food poverty research. Any critical research wishing to avoid falling into either of these traps should therefore reflect carefully on the value of academic research, how it is being utilised and who may benefit from it. As Angermüller (2018b) argues by using examples of the REF and citation practices in Higher Education, academic outputs present forms of discursive capital which are assigned value in market environments. Taking a post-Marxist perspective, he illustrates that research as a discursive practice always generates value and, conversely, participants in these discourses actively value their subject positions to benefit in different ways. As discursive capital is then recognised and transferred between discourse communities and institutions, it can be accumulated in support of existing social hierarchies and thereby reinforce inequalities. The dominant discourse of empirical evidence collection can be seen as such a valuation practice producing valued outputs as discursive capital to support charity structures (through funding and improved corporate networks and public image) while maintaining and reinforcing material inequalities. Research outputs, like those shared with the Trussell Trust and policy

makers at the ENUF conference, are accumulated forms of discursive capital which has been extracted or ‘absorbed’ (Angermüller, 2018b) by members of the discourse community, in this case from food bank volunteers and ‘clients’. They are valued resources which are then widely advertised and used in defence of the franchise’s policies, and even to attract investment: For instance, the Trussell Trust (2018a) intends to use parts of the £20m-worth partnership with Asda to fund more research into the causes of food poverty.

Declaring support for the RTF and providing practical recommendations for reforming food banks in the meantime then provides researchers with not just a moral but a valuable position and puts them in good standing with the food charities from where they can produce more evidence as discursive capital to increase the value of their own position. Critical analysis of the use and valuation of academic knowledge within the economy of poverty (Selke, 2017) therefore requires going beyond empirical evidence collection and policy advocacy to understand food poverty as a terrain for discursive struggles where knowledge is constantly produced, valued and contested. Critical research should be sensitive to these politics of knowledge and wider links between an academic system which rewards productivity and the social conditions in which outputs are produced (Beetz & Schwab, 2017) with material consequences.

### ***Decolonising poverty research***

Refusing to turn food bank users’ accounts into another academic report, Selke (2013) has made use of innovative methods and writing styles, including a chorus of food bank users which powerfully conveys their experiences without the filter of an authoritative researcher presenting and instrumentalising their voices. Smith (1999) too recounts how her participants in an indigenous community did not want their voices to be exploited for academic purposes but to be shared within the culture of the indigenous community. There is clearly potential here for more innovative and participatory approaches; yet the best examples of user-led poverty research and campaigns are perhaps those which no longer require an academic researcher: Witnesses to Hunger is one such participatory project by the Center for Hunger-

free Communities (2018) in the US which combines political activism with photo storytelling and community-based research led by young mothers affected by hunger and poverty. These examples show why a sensitivity for discursive capital and the role of intellectuals is so important: Why would academic researchers, or food banks for that matter, make themselves redundant when there is still so much more to be gained, so many more stories to be absorbed, books to be sold and scientific papers to be published? If poverty itself becomes a fictitious commodity (Selke, 2017) to be traded and marketed to substitute-consumers by food banks as moral enterprises, then what does that mean for poverty research as a valuation practice? What are the links to corporate interests and what are the new funding and career opportunities offered by the steady, yet easily condemned, institutionalisation of charity?

Such decolonised critique would first require methodological and epistemological innovation, since, as Audre Lorde (2007, p. 111) put it, “the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house”. Drawing on the important work of Tuhiwai Smith (1999) on the imperial and colonial functions and meanings of research in indigenous communities, Rutherford (2018, p. 636) argues that, historically, seemingly objective research, and psychology in particular, “is steeped in a history of extraction of “data” from indigenous peoples in order to further the reputations of (non-indigenous) academics, their institutions, and the dominant culture”. As good intentioned as some attempts to generate more evidence of the extent and nature of food poverty may be, they frequently have violent effects for the objects of study while ‘colonial’ researchers are left to reap the benefits. Ethnographic case studies and thematic analyses of client stories reproduce particular versions of the ‘worthy’ poor (Möller, 2015; Williams et al., 2016) with the Trussell Trust then reusing the data for their own purposes. Such realist methodologies have a long history in what Erickson (2018) calls the ‘golden age’ of ethnographies which often focused on documenting the exotic ‘Other’ from a colonial perspective. Similarly, food bank ethnographies remain within a colonial legacy of anthropology in their fascination with the poor Other where researchers never abandon their privileged position from which they get to define and speak the truth about poverty to produce

mere counter-narratives as useful knowledge. The promise of giving voice to a hidden reality of poverty becomes fetishised, using essentially the same methods of 'poverty porn' to observe and study the poor, which does nothing to improve material conditions but only reifies them as distant group of exotic Others.

Feminist critiques have since challenged such empowerment discourses and their role in constituting neoliberal subjects (Cruikshank, 1999; Gill & Kanai, 2018) while stressing the importance of positionality, space, complexity and partial knowledges (Haraway, 1988) but have so far not found their way into the realist area of food poverty research. By introducing a critical reflexivity and alternative conception of power-knowledge, what can be made visible and contestable, then, are the specific techniques and responses (Dreyfus and Rabinow, 1985, p. 132) with which food poverty is problematised, made knowable and governable by experts in newly created spaces. In practical terms, Foucault (Foucault, 2003b, pp. 46–47) here suggests a broader focus on dispositives as “apparatuses of domination” rather than institutional or state centres of sovereign power, as power strategies always “use local tactics of domination” which require the analysts to “identify the technical instruments that guarantee that they function” in situated settings and specific times. Critical discourse analysis grounded in Foucault’s philosophy provides important methodological tools as necessary first step to break open rigid and invisible power relations to create a space for debate, contestation and invention for more collaborative approaches to decolonise poverty research. Materialist approaches to discourse analysis are particularly suited for such a project as they provide “a practical movement that evades the reproduction of the status quo, and collectively seeks to recover and reinvent practices of transformation” (Beetz and Schwab, 2018, p. 347), which is a radically different ambition from the dominant empiricism and policy advocacy in existing research. Such approach then “dismisses the empiricist myth of an easy separation between research object and knowledge production” (Beetz & Schwab, 2018, p. 347) by actively challenging the ways ‘clients’ are discursively constructed as survivors of austerity and objects for scientific study.

A critical ontology of food charity which combines materialist, feminist and ‘post-structuralist’ elements can resist this empiricist objectification of the world to emphasise the active co-construction of human and non-human actors through discourse, non-discursive practices and materialisations of knowledge (Clarke et al., 2017). As a contribution in critical psychology, this study does not reduce food bank ‘clients’ to static, pre-existing recipients with fixed identities to be measured and observed but explores their genesis as subjects of charity and objects of power to ask what the implications are for possible ways of experiencing, suffering and solving what is problematised as ‘food poverty’ at the level of subjectivity.

This thesis should be read as an attempt to lay the necessary groundwork for such decolonisation and a larger critique of neoliberal government, initially through a critical and situational analysis of food charity and its problematisations, power effects and wider social consequences. In the following chapter, I wish to make a case for a critical ontology of food charity which, based on the outlined discursive limits and gaps, concentrates on three under-researched and under-theorised areas, namely (1) the power effects and problematisations by food charities in everyday practices, (2) the interactions, visibilities and constructions of food poverty at public collection events and (3) the active processes of subject formation through material and non-food interventions where ‘More than Food’ programmes have so far remained unscrutinised.

### 3 Toward a critical ontology of food charity today

This chapter sets out the three overarching aims of the study along with its theoretical foundations and formulates research questions capable of disrupting dominant knowledge through a critical ontology of food charity. Throughout, I am drawing closely on key concepts and philosophies in Michel Foucault's work, and those who have taken up his project since, to formulate research aims which promise critical potential and a radically different account compared to the outlined realist objectification of food poverty in existing research. As both philosophical foundation and intended research outcome, a critical ontology is concerned with "the limits and possibilities of how we have come to think about who we are, what we do and the present in which we find ourselves" (Dean, 1996, p. 210) and opposed to the accumulation of scientific knowledge explored in the previous chapter:

*"The critical ontology of ourselves has to be considered not, certainly, as a theory, a doctrine, nor even as a permanent body of knowledge that is accumulating; it has to be conceived as an attitude, an ethos, a philosophical life in which the critique of what we are is at one and the same time the historical analysis of the limits that are imposed on us and an experiment with the possibility of going beyond them."* (Foucault, 2000b, p. 319)

A contribution in critical psychology directs attention to the functions of psychological 'truths' about poverty, including how scientific solutions to social problems evade questions of how we have come to be what we are today (Williams, 2017b). Recognising the 'multiplicity' (Dean, 1996) of different ontologies and ways of experiencing ourselves as subjects, I am therefore not intending to produce a more truthful account of poverty or what it *really* means to be a subject of food charity. Instead of building theories, critical ontologies in Foucault's tradition seek to establish histories of truth to allow a critical engagement, diagnostic and possible resistance of the limits imposed on our present reality. Testing how these aims could be met

within existing methodological frameworks, the following sections offer critical reflections on current debates in and around discourse analysis and its applications in psychology. Having outlined useful insights and limitation across different approaches, I will propose a different methodological path inspired by materialist readings of Foucault, a turn towards the non-discursive and material in dispositive studies (Bührmann & Schneider, 2008) and more flexible analytical techniques in situational analysis (Clarke et al., 2017). With this tailored and self-reflexive approach, I am also setting and testing study-specific criteria for a suitable, philosophically and ontologically consistent methodological approach which

- a) avoids both trivial relativism and realist empiricism reducing discourse to text,
- b) offers new insights into relational processes of subjectification without applying and reaffirming static concepts and subject positions, and finally
- c) takes the material and non-human seriously in the interplay with discursive and non-discursive practices.

Followed by critical discussion of key debates and limitations in applied discourse analysis in psychology with a dominance of textual empiricism and disregard for history, I take a contrasting look at various textbook approaches to Foucauldian Discourse Analysis (FDA) as an established method in psychology. Despite added critical potentials, these will be shown to disregard materiality while relying on selective concepts and maintain a text-based notion of discourse. Having discussed these shortcomings, I will introduce Siegfried Jäger's (2015) reading of Foucault as a materialist discourse theory which maintains a political purpose and critical ethos by turning to the non-discursive and material elements of dispositives and their social consequences. Following these discussions, I turn towards the neglected value of the visual in discourse studies and the role of images and ways of seeing for the production of normality. Finally, drawing together insights from my own research journey, I will propose that situational analysis offers new and flexible methodological tools for a critical research programme which takes seriously materiality, the non-discursive and the relational (re)production of discourses by human actors.



## **Research aims and philosophy**

### ***Aim 1: Reconstructing problematisations of food poverty***

In the previous chapter, existing research on food poverty was shown to be dominated by social policy studies, overwhelmingly concerned with the measurement and causal impact of food poverty as a distinct phenomenon. By making food poverty or food banks themselves the objects of analysis, these studies disregard the role of discourses in constituting the social problem and targeting problematic groups for intervention. Even qualitative research using ethnographic methods and case studies (Wakefield, Fleming, Klassen, & Skinner, 2013) attempts to document, sort and analyse the ‘true’ experiences of food bank volunteers, and sometimes clients, without challenging the power strategies and normative discourses which constitute these accounts. The disregard for the productive and performative function of language is characteristic of realist epistemologies as well as positivistic attempts to produce useful and authoritative knowledge offering direct insights into observable aspects of poverty. In contrast, a social constructionist ontology (Burr, 2015) is directly concerned with how seemingly natural phenomena are created and maintained through human practices and meaning making. It recognises the culturally and historically specific plurality of different versions of reality produced through language use. By doing so, constructionism always questions the production of truthful knowledge itself and assumes a critical stance towards any universal claims about the nature or quality of experience.

For Foucault (2000a), the genealogy of problems as the way certain aspects of reality are constructed and rendered problematic was a central and consistent concern throughout his work. He distinguishes thought from ideas and mentalities as systems of representation and underlying attitudes and behaviour respectively: For him, thought is not what gives meaning to conduct but what “allows one to step back from this way of acting or reacting, to present it to oneself as an object of thought and to question it as to its meaning, its condition and its goals” (Foucault, 2000a, p.117). ‘Presentation’ takes the form of historical forms of problematisations which constitute objects as difficulties and make possible certain ways of

imagining and acting upon them, while excluding others. Foucault also stresses that different, simultaneous and often contradictory responses to the same problematisations can be made, pointing to different approaches to mental illness in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, but demands paying attention to the problematisations which make them possible by ‘nourishing’ the ground for their existence. The analytical task then lies in rediscovering forms of problematisation:

*“It is problematization that responds to these difficulties, but by doing something quite other than expressing them or manifesting them: in connection with them, it develops the conditions in which possible responses can be given; it defines the elements that will constitute what the different solutions attempt to respond to.” (Foucault, 2000a, p. 118)*

This connection between rendering visible and thinkable certain objects as problems while simultaneously developing the conditions and imposing limits on possible responses seems crucial here; and it is also what makes it a highly specific form of constructionism grounded in history and anti-essentialism. Challenging new problematisations of the everyday means rejecting exclusive concerns with meaning-making at individual level and representations of behaviour as merely competing framings in favour of a “movement of critical analysis in which one tries to see how the different solutions to a problem have been constructed; but also how these different solutions result from a specific form of problematization” (Foucault, 2000a, p. 119). Productive, historical processes of problematisation are therefore indivisible from the range of responses they make possible and the social practices they demand as solutions.

For Koopman (2014, pp. 399–400), problematisation remains “one of the centremost ideas” of Foucault’s infamous methodological ‘toolkit’ but also plays a “dual role”: In addition to the outlined analytical component of philosophic inquiry into historical objects, it also entails acts of problematisation by researchers themselves whereby we might come to understand ourselves differently by giving coherence to otherwise only implicit senses of how objects are rendered problematic – making them more challenging in a political process:

*“To think critically is to problematize concepts, to call into question evidence and postulates, to break habits and ways of acting and thinking, to dissipate the familiar and accepted, to retrieve the measure of rules and institutions, to show the techniques of production of knowledge, and the techniques of domination, and also the techniques of control of discourse. Then starting from this (re)problematization it is possible for citizens to take part in the formation of a political will.” (Rojo & Pujol, 2011, p. 98)*

While I cannot claim to have created these objects through my own problematising activity, I can make coherent their ethical implications to clarify and intensify problems (Koopman, 2014) to show how they act upon the understanding of ourselves. My interest then lies in the ways food poverty emerges as a set of problems which, within a shared cultural and historical context, become powerful and present themselves as objects for a variety of interventions. Rather than limit analysis to competing constructions and their discursive origins, which could invite textual relativism, the next steps necessarily links these to the possible solutions in the diverse responses that are being mobilised across food banks, partner charities and external advice services. Such approach poses a fundamental challenge to the ways ‘emergency responses’ to hunger have been conceptualised across the current literature by attributing a productive role to these actors and organisations who actively create the conditions for how food poverty can be solved. It is directly at odds with both realist and positivist paradigms which accept food poverty as an externally existing phenomenon which can be observed or experienced and studied independently. For discourse research, sharing Foucault’s dual concern for problematisations also brings important practical and theoretical implications:

*“Problematizations serve an epistemological and methodological purpose of allowing the analyst to take up a critical position in relation to how problems are formed and to show how they constitute objects and practices.” (Arribas-Ayllon & Walkerdine, 2017, p. 99)*

Above, I have already begun to outline what such ‘critical position’ entails but would add that it requires stepping back from the versions of reality sustained by those claiming to be merely responding to food poverty as naturally given and externally existing problem. The previous chapter has shown how ethnographic researchers fail to reflect on their own position as volunteers and remain incapable of taking a critical stance to the ways in which food charities are interwoven in the discursive construction and government of poverty. Rather than documenting internal processes of food banks as objective realities of those ‘solving’ or experiencing poverty, shifting focus onto problematisations then allows studying the emergence of new problems, how they are composed of existing practices (Koopman, 2014) and give rise to new ones.

Inevitably, this invites the question of how and why food poverty has emerged as social problem and how it can be governed at a particular time. Yet, strictly genealogical analyses in Foucault’s tradition (Carabine, 2001) tend to privilege archival methods and problematise only the textual emergence of the phenomenon while disregarding other types of practices and material elements. In contrast, a reconstructive-interpretative analysis (Bührmann & Schneider, 2008) sets a very different empirical task of reconstructing the ‘having-become’ (*geworden-sein*) of a social order and experienced reality as the result of principally contingent human action. Such approach to Foucault’s critical ontology seeks to overcome both distanced objectivism in genealogical methods and more subject-centred perspectives (Dreyfus & Rabinow, 1983) by examining instead the specific conditions and reconstructing the otherwise tacit knowledge invested in practices (Jäger & Maier, 2016). Focusing on why food poverty has appeared at this moment in time also bears the danger of succumbing to debates in causality with linear impacts of government policy, thereby again absolving charities of their productive roles. Instead, I would like to explore more the (unintended) consequences, power effects and who benefits from these problematisations, which is reflected in my first research question:

*Q1: How is food poverty being problematised by food banks and partner agencies in their everyday practices and what are the power effects of interventions?*

My active wording here signals a sensitivity to the active role of organisations and individual speakers in creating knowledge and problematising aspects of food poverty, not as past events to be studied in archives but as discourses which are lived out and put into everyday practice in local contexts. I am also including both discursive and non-discursive practices in recognition that these are always context-specific and locally complex without being reducible to governmental rationalities (McKee, 2018). Without being confined to institutional settings, the question extends analysis of discourses across settings, such as food collection events. A discursive approach further aims to develop a non-economic understanding of power giving centrality instead to the production of ‘truth discourses’, that is the ways “we are judged, condemned, forced to perform tasks, and destined to live and die in certain ways by discourses that are true, and which bring with them specific power-effects” (Foucault, 2003a, p. 25) affecting ‘clients’ and volunteers alike. Finally, it combines problematisations in forms of true discourses on ‘vital’ aspects of life (Rabinow & Rose, 2006) with connected solutions in the forms of intervention strategies in wider areas of health, wellbeing and lifestyle targeted at individuals, groups and communities.

***Aim 2: Challenging the normality of food charity***

With the first aim I have already linked a concern for problematisations with a critical ethos towards knowledge production which I will now extend to the normalising effects of discourses. Jäger (2008a) argues that while some discourses are institutionalised and dominant as recognised truths, they can be criticised and problematised by revealing their productive features and contradictions and exploring their range of possibilities, that is what can/cannot be said and done, and what is expected of subjects at a given point. A discourse analysis of food charities then challenges the ways problematisations and solutions establish and support existing temporarily valid truths and come to be accepted as self-evident and assumed to be universally true beyond doubt. Today’s sense of normality must then be

considered as the outcome of contingent discursive processes (Jäger & Jäger, 2007) with a historical function in controlling and regulating the boundaries of normality. Drawing on Jürgen Link's theory of 'normalism', Jäger and Jäger (2007) show how these boundaries between the normal and abnormal are not static but always outcomes of discursive struggles. It is this flexible normalism which creates in subjects a fear of de-normalisation as lost sense of normality, which drives the need for their self-positioning within the acceptable boundaries while exercising the necessary self-regulation and discipline to remain there. Normalising power then has a regulatory and highly productive function that "acts on the formation of habits, on rationalising principles and historical legitimisations" (Morey, 1992, p. 119). Abandoning the dominant narrative of a mere 'response' to state retreat, this raises the question of *how* food banks have attained their normality and which discourses, actors, and organisations are involved in mediating their knowledge over time. Again, a historical understanding of discourse is vital for appreciating how what appears as normal and common-sense today may in fact have very a different origin (*Herkunft*):

*"All things which last for a long time become progressively so well imbued with reason that it becomes incredible that they may have originated in a way which was other than reasonable." (Nietzsche cited in Morey, 1992, p. 119)*

Given the normalising power of discourses, any irrationality fades over time to be replaced by common-sense solutions where Jäger (2008b, p. 24) advocates the "political effectiveness" of critical discourse research not in the potential for merely criticising discourses from a normative position but "to influence them, to irritate them, to expose them as 'irrational' and narrow-minded, reduce them to absurdity or show alternatives to its truths". Although one of the most frequent criticisms of Foucault's work has been his reluctance to outline or prescribe ways of resistance outside of normalising power, his 'permanent criticism' allows researchers to "show that things are not as self-evident as one believed, to see that what is accepted as self-evident will no longer be accepted as such" while the practice of constant criticism becomes

transformational as a “matter of making facile gestures difficult” (Foucault, 1988b, p. 155) by revealing the complex power effects of easy solutions of donating and redistributing food. I will return to these questions of positionality and political dimensions of discourse research in later sections.

Foucault’s critical ontology of the present, as read by Morey (1992, p. 119), further invites researchers to “think differently” and opens up space for critique founded in the “combat against the normal, against the norms of telling and the so-called normality of our present”:

*“Foucault always targets and problematises the production of a certain normality, the division between the normal and the abnormal and the weight of the normal on the present” (Morey, 1992, pp. 122–123)*

It is this active normalisation of food charity as sensible, natural, effective and common-sense solution to poverty in the context of a ‘retreating’ welfare state and austerity that I wish to problematise and engage in ‘combat’ with through my second research question:

*Q2: How is food poverty made visible at public food collection events and how do situated discursive and non-discursive practices interact with the material to present solutions?*

This question invites a series of critical reflections on how contemporary constructions of food charity ‘weigh’ on our present and what possible divisions are drawn between ‘normal’ conduct of volunteering or donating and deviant non-compliance and refusal to participate in interventions. It invites thinking about how dominant discourses make visible, possible, and likely, particular solutions and subjectivities as ways of thinking, speaking, seeing and feeling about poverty. It requires a localised ‘unburdening’ from the norms of our present (Morey, 1992, p. 124), not to dictate alternatives in the same breath but to explore new ground: Once present norms have been laid bare and the “local character of things” can be made visible, then “maybe the present will be released from the weight of the past” so alternative ways of thinking, that is of problematising, can emerge. Ideally, challenging the inevitability of charitable technologies will then bring forward this effect of strangeness on the present while

powerful forces are working towards making food charity a common occurrence seemingly outside of power, hence outside of critique.

An emphasis on visibility recognises how discourses always “make available certain ways-of-seeing the world and certain ways-of-being in the world” (Willig, 2008, p. 113), giving it a central function in the production of normality where an institutional gaze “casts light on some things and leaves others in the shadows” (Renggli, 2015, p. 188). Since discursive and non-discursive practices are not confined to institutional settings like food banks, they operate through flows of knowledge with local power effects: Active processes of normalisation and intervention can also be found across public food collections and “More than Food” community services where they become part of discourse production within the on-going institutionalisation of food charity. Supermarket food collections have so far been neglected in research, even though food banks rely heavily on them for donations and funding. I will therefore aim to fill this gap by paying specific attention to the institutional practices within supermarkets as consumer spaces guiding actions and interests by the range of actors involved.

### ***Aim 3: Exploring and resisting the subjection and subjectification of food bank ‘clients’ and volunteers***

The third and final aim seeks to challenge static categories of food bank ‘clients’ and volunteers by overcoming established narratives which construct these groups as merely driven by causal factors and experiencing poverty in different ways. While studies continue to reinforce categories of risk and vulnerability in their quest for measuring and documenting food poverty, a Foucauldian approach would see these positions instead as constituted through power with subjects being actively involved in their self-constitution (Foucault, 2002e). Consequently, a critical analysis of subjectification must be extended to the internal rules, mundane practices and autonomous acts within the cultural setting of food banks where situated practices produce subjects through disciplinary mechanisms but also through their self-practices and routine interactions between clients and volunteers. Despite shifting foci



between structures and ethical self-formation in his work, Foucault maintained a consistent concern with a critical ontology of subjectivity founded on a distinct philosophical position which rejects universal truths and demands abandoning humanist notions of the fixed and universal subject:

*“It seems to me that the philosophical choice confronting us today is the following. We have to opt either for a critical philosophy which appears as an analytical philosophy of truth in general, or for a critical thought which takes the form of an ontology of ourselves, of present reality.”*

*(Foucault, 2010, p. 21)*

With this latter form of a critical philosophy, in which Foucault locates himself and his work, any general and universal truths of poverty must be rejected as historical effects of power-knowledge in favour of locally-specific detailed analyses sensitive to change, partiality and complexity. Such approach then requires a repudiation of all universals where the present or “the current is not what we are but rather what we are in the process of becoming - that is the Other, our becoming-other” (Deleuze, 1992, p. 164). Conceiving such new modes of subject formation as fluid, fragmented, contested and reversible processes of both disciplinary domination and ethical self-formation through freedom has important ontological implications: In response to frequent critiques of Foucault’s alleged denial of the subject’s existence, Jäger (2002, p. 38) shows that Foucault’s own analyses are “not directed against the subject but against subjectivism and individualism”, that is the ways we are made to understand ourselves as subjects and act accordingly within the confines of available discourses. Simons (1995, p. 3) here refers to Foucault’s work on limits as contrasts between the “unbearable lightness and heaviness”, of being caught up between a constraining ‘heavy’ disciplinary pole imposing purposeful individualities and the practices of freedom where being denied any purpose would make life ‘unbearably light’ in comparison. To refuse what we are today then first requires an analytical account of how these limits as conditions of possibility are imposed on us through subjection and subjectification. Discourse analysis can identify

these discursive limits (Jäger & Maier, 2016) as the borders of the sayable and hence allows subverting or extending them.

As the food bank subject itself becomes the target of problematisations, my empirical questions are concerned with how norms for expected behaviour are formulated and imposed, but also freely put into practice, and responsibilities are assigned and divisions between positions are drawn before identifying and prescribing solutions in the form of individual interventions targeting vulnerabilities to optimise capacities. Dominant problematisations, discussed under the first research aim, are then intimately tied to processes of subjection which set the conditions and expectations for normative conduct which need to be made visible and explicit. The added critical potential of such project should become visible here, as problematisations always “form the conditions of possibility for the present and act as limits on who we are and who we might yet become” (Koopman, 2014, p. 401). Without accounting for these problematisations, we remain blind to their effects on the present and risk missing out on becoming other than what we are today; their critical analysis becomes the foundation of critique and attempts to think differently with a view to reconfiguring the arbitrary limits imposed on our reality. The third and final research question reflects these thoughts with a focus on discursive (self-)positioning and subject formation:

*Q3 How are ‘clients’ and volunteers discursively positioned but also actively involved in their own subjectification across different food bank services?*

This question turns towards moral-ethical dimensions to consider what aspects of life are being problematised, what the personal implications are for proposed causes and solutions to food poverty, along with what incapacities are being diagnosed and what the moral-political implications for *being* a food bank ‘client’ or volunteer might be. At the same time, it rejects any universal analysis of food poverty as a social phenomenon, its causes and different solutions in favour of a critical ontology of our present reality, that is how we have come to be divided into volunteers, food bank ‘clients’ and donors. I am therefore not concerned with the

quality of experience in itself, but the conditions of possibility for actual subjectification and how arbitrary limits imposed on reality are lived out through subjects putting into practice available rationalities. I am also emphasising the active involvement of ‘clients’ and volunteers in their subjectification through their own truth-telling capacity and relational interactions with others which goes beyond static subject positions as linear outcomes of discourse (Bührmann, 2012).

Having outlined and justified my research questions guided by the three research aims, the following sections turn to specific methodological approaches where I will evaluate their utility and limitations in relation to the discussed philosophical underpinnings of this study. Then, with the methodological requirements laid out, I will assemble and redesign my ‘toolkit’ where necessary.

## **Discourse analysis in psychology: A critical introduction – and a rejection**

### ***Discursive psychology***

In their recent introduction to discursive psychology, Wiggins and Potter (2017) show how this approach makes psychology and psychological concepts such as attitudes, identities and behaviour the objects of analysis with an alternative concern for their discursive (re)production in everyday social life. Giving centrality to ‘discursive repertoires’ as culturally available patterns and sets of metaphors for achieving social actions through talk, the authors also distinguish discursive psychology from other forms of discourse analysis in its demand for ‘naturalistic’ data. Discursive psychology tends to dismiss interview methods and other data not produced ‘naturally’ without interference by a researcher (Wetherell, 2015), along with any interpretative attempts to go beyond the data and participants’ actions and orientation available within it. Instead, the focus of analysis remains entirely on the creative ways people construct versions of psychological concepts (Wiggins & Potter, 2017) and how these in turn have consequences for individuals’ actions and their discursive experiences of

the world. In practical terms, this perspective then informs research questions with a directed focus on linguistic practices and personal interactions in a specific setting from which ‘natural’ data are collected and analysed.

Such empiricist obsessions (Parker, 2007, 2015b) with natural data, rigorous transcription and coding combined with a rejection of interpretative analysis and insistence on testing and validating analysis of the ‘phenomenon’ then remain closely aligned to the dominant scientific paradigm within psychology. It maintains an objectivist ontology whereby close work with ‘naturalistic’ data is said to stay “faithful (as far as possible) to the phenomena being examined” (Wiggins & Potter, 2017, p. 104): Data remains something to be collected, not co-produced, by objective researchers seemingly outside the production of knowledge and merely ‘capturing’ the discursive behaviour (Parker, 2007) of ‘subjects’ who in fact remain isolated objects of analysis. Indeed, the entire concept of discursive repertoires serves to relocate culturally and historically produced knowledge inside the individual where it can then be studied without having to account for its emergence through discursive struggles within the social. This refusal of reflexivity and any look beyond the immediate setting of speakers, their dependency on socially available discourses and historical formations of studied ‘phenomena’ has been met with strong opposition by some critical psychologists. While Parker and Burman (1993) identify an impressive 32 problems with discourse analysis, I will only concentrate on two key areas of textual empiricism and its conception of the subject which have major consequences for methodology, reflexivity and the end product of any analysis. Within this discussion, I also include competing frameworks in critical discursive psychology (Wetherell, 2015; Parker, 2015) and Foucauldian discourse analysis (Arribas-Ayllon and Walkerdine, 2016; Hook, 2013; Willig, 2013), which despite their added critical potential do not provide me with the necessary tools and strategies for a critical ontology of food charity outlined above.

Recent responses and developments in critical discursive psychology (Edley & Wetherell, 1997; Reynolds & Wetherell, 2016) from feminist perspectives differ from the discussed approaches in discursive psychology in their ontological assumptions to shift focus from

situated speakers onto social structures, inequalities and exercise of power “through the minute details of everyday normativity” (Wetherell, 2008, p. 320). Following this split within discursive psychology, Wetherell (2008, p. 318) rightly emphasises how psychology itself is located within practices and socially distributed so that “subjectivity and identity will be more conflicted, inconsistent, fragmented, and multiple than traditionally assumed”. Recognising this connectedness of practices to situation and context, later sections on situational analysis will account for exactly this relationality, messiness and partiality in discourse analysis.

In his wide-ranging critique of discursive psychology in its various forms, Hook (2007) makes a strong case for a Foucauldian approach in critical psychology, drawing on Foucault’s (1990) *Order of Discourse* lecture, to present a strictly genealogical method maintaining original concerns with history, materiality and discursive structures. He convincingly highlights the dangers in discursive psychology of establishing individual agents, merely positioned by discourse in some way but otherwise remaining autonomous actors to be studied as objects of scientific inquiry. Indeed, discursive psychology maintains a traditional conception of subjects and implicitly locates essential tendencies for self-positioning, discursive strategies and repertoires inside the individual where they can be studied in ‘natural’, that is isolated and controlled, settings. This reduction of social context, history and influence by researchers as ‘confounding’ and invalidating dangers remains very similar to experimental psychology. In their recent critique of established schools in discourse analysis, Beetz and Schwab (2018, p. 344) blame the “linguistic bias” in social psychology and interactionist approaches for ignoring the material structures and social conditions which ‘anchor’ discourse production. Discursive psychology remains intentionally blind to this infrastructure in its behaviourist obsession with observable speech. While discursive psychology has been argued to be prone to relativism and new empiricisms (Parker, 2015b), I would go further in that it invites neoliberal mutations of constructionism (Chandler, 2016a; Palacios, 2018) which deny any agency in shaping the material world while forcing focus onto the individual’s psyche regardless of structural constraints or discourses outside immediate spaces of interaction.

In his critique, Hook (2007, p. 117) also remains highly critical of Parker's earlier 'pan-textualism' in discourse analysis favouring meaning over systems of power-knowledge where anything can be read as a text. Instead, he points to a Foucauldian perspective where the "power in language links to, and stems from, external, material and tactical forms of power" and hence "cannot be fixed, or apprehended in the meanings and significations of texts alone; rather it must be grasped and traced through the analysis of tactical and material relations of force". After outlining standardised steps for this 'tracing' of power-knowledge based on principles from Foucault's original lecture, Hook (2001) vehemently rejects interpretivism which he claims reifies the text while maintaining truthful readings in favour of a seemingly more objective endeavour "to map discourse" and its power effects across different forms. Throughout his critique, Hook (2007) maintains a quasi-positivistic notion of discourse analysis without allowing for interpretation or reflexivity which fails to appreciate how his descriptive 'mapping' itself constitutes truth claims which will in turn have power effects, making all mapping necessarily selective, interpretative efforts driven by choices and the researcher's (institutional) background.

However, by broadening the definition of discourse beyond language and textuality, Hook (2007) extends the analytical scope of discourse analysis to power effects and dominant systems of knowledge, including psychology itself, and I will adopt a similar definition in the next section. His critique forms an important contribution to a critical psychology offering "a methodology of suspicion and critique, an array of defamiliarizing procedures and reconceptualizations" of scientific truths "whose overall function is to oppose the centralizing power-effects of institutional knowledge and scientific discourse" (Hook, 2007, p. 140) so prominent in psychology. The analytical goal then becomes not to produce 'more truthful' subjugated accounts but to disrupt and cut lines of dominant knowledge, befitting my proposed critical ontology of food charity. Likewise, Hook (2007) recognises the limited conception of the subject in discursive psychology as autonomous speakers equipped with strategies and repertoires to offer an opposing Foucauldian insight into the mutual

constitution of meaning where discourse, practice and materiality are all relational with implications for subject formation.

### ***‘Foucauldian’ discourse analysis***

In contrast to Hook’s (2001, p. 132) close reading of the *Orders of Discourse* and his claim that "there exists no strictly Foucauldian method of discourse analysis" based on strict criteria set in that lecture, various attempts have been made to standardise “Foucauldian” analysis and develop it into a competitive brand among other methodologies, particularly in psychology. In the UK, methodological guides in psychological textbook format (Willig, 2014, p. 344) fail to abandon the exclusive focus on discourse as texts seen in discursive psychology with the sole ambition "to produce a particular kind of reading of a text" based on research questions and limited investigation of discursive effects. Elsewhere, Willig (2013) provides a more structured guide of FDA entailing a series of steps or stages maintaining a psychological concern with empirical and verifiable text-based analysis through standardised applications of established methods. Elsewhere, Kendall and Wickham (1999) use selected concepts and tools from Foucault’s archaeological and genealogical analyses detached from his philosophies, and in the process effectively strip away any of his critical ethos and political potential of research.

In contrast, Arribas-Ayllon and Walkerdine (2017) offer a useful introduction to key concepts in Foucault’s work and effectively link these to historical critiques of the psy-complex for an invitation to take up these ideas in critical psychological projects. Although their offered guidelines focus on four key areas of problematisation, technologies, subject positions and processes of subjectification, all of which are covered across my research aims above, they offer little practical guidance for research design and methods and it remains unclear how analysis from the four areas can be synthesised into a coherent account. Much like discursive psychology, data collection is said to generate a ‘corpus’ as samples of discourses to be studied, although here these are understood as providing the rules for the constitution of objects, rather than rhetorical devices to be used by active speakers. The exclusive focus on “samples of text” once more reduces discourse to language while ignoring the on-going social production of

knowledge as well as the active involvement of subjects. Situated speakers, capable of interpretation and action within available discourses remain absent within this approach along with any non-textual data sources derived from non-archival methods of social scientific inquiry.

This section has briefly outlined some well-established approaches in discursive psychology and in drawing on contributions in critical psychology, I have shown how it tends to disregard materiality and visibility, while its inherent textual empiricism (Parker, 2007, p. 137) re-describes language use using technical jargon with scientific claims to produce an approach whose “exercise is as pointless as it is mind-numbingly unilluminating”, as Parker puts it. Its total disregard for historicity and the production of knowledge over time means it cannot reconstruct social problems (aim 1), while FDA too remains text-focused and tied to methodological demands within the discipline which disregard the visual and non-discursive (aim 2). Strictly Foucauldian approaches, despite their critical potential, were shown to suffer from a rejection of interpretivism and privileging of history as an ‘outside’ of human practice which cannot account for the active roles of speaking subjects I am interested in (aim 3). Nevertheless, I will respond to Hook’s (2007) call to take seriously material deficits in discourse analysis and lacking concerns for power-knowledge manifested in institutions with a turn to visual data and dispositive analysis. I will also argue that FDA’s turn to action orientation, technologies and some self-reflexive capacity by subjects as active speakers can be more fully theorised and developed by drawing on schools of discourse analysis outside of psychology.

In this context, Burman and Parker (2015) propose moving beyond discourse analysis in psychology to suggest a turn towards psychoanalysis, and while I certainly share these concerns based on the discussed problems within the discipline, I would like to propose a different turn towards the material, visual and recent developments in grounded theory which may resolve many of the outlined critiques – and undoubtedly create new ones. In this context, it seems important to develop methods, not as an end in itself in order to claim originality and



produce new academic outputs but to keep up and adapt to novel modes of knowledge production across different media and invite reflexive dialogue between disciplines which share a research interest in critical analyses of power and the making of subjects.

## **Theoretical and methodological foundations**

In this section I am introducing alternative approaches in critical discourse analysis which, despite their close engagement with Foucault's work, have received little attention in the UK literature. For now over 30 years, Siegfried Jäger and colleagues at the Duisburg Institute for Linguistics and Social Research (ISS) in Germany have been developing a comprehensive methodological framework in *Kritischer Diskursanalyse* (KDA<sup>2</sup>) based on Foucault's work but also drawing on further developments in discourse theory and normalism by Jürgen Link (1997). Now in its seventh edition, Jäger's (2015) introduction to KDA presents a comprehensive and coherent understanding of discourse by linking it to the production of material reality and the exercise of power, which I will adopt and return to throughout this thesis. In addition to the outlined problems in both discursive psychology and FDA, psychology is still maintaining a false dichotomy between so-called "top-down" or macro approaches (Burr, 2015) to discourse analysis concerned with power and ideology and more "bottom-up" versions grounded in traditions of conversation analysis and ethnomethodology. Although Edley and Wetherell (1997, p. 206) have encouraged more flexible combinations of the two in recognition of the dilemma that "people are simultaneously the products *and* the producers of discourse", little progress appears to have been made since then within the discipline. Here, KDA will be shown to offer a possible alternative which acknowledges a more active role of subjects as active speakers and users of discourse while also accounting for the social production of knowledge with a commitment to political engagement and social change. Then, extending discourse analysis to non-discursive and material elements will allow me to conceptualise food charity as 'dispositive' with implications for research design in relation to

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<sup>2</sup> I am using the German term throughout to distinguish Jäger's work from established forms of critical discourse analysis (CDA) in the UK.

the three outlined aims of the study. Despite providing a comprehensive materialist discourse theory that is thoroughly and convincingly grounded in Foucault's critical ethos, the methodological shortcomings and limited flexibility of KDA will then leave me to turn to recent developments in situational analysis as a toolkit for critical qualitative research.

### ***Entanglements of discourse, power and materiality***

In his close reading of Foucault, Jäger consistently defines discourses as “flows of knowledge through time and space” (Jäger & Maier, 2016, p. 117) and considers them social means of production in the constitution of subjects and material reality:

*“Firstly, discourses form individual and mass consciousness and thereby constitute individual and collective subjects. Secondly, since consciousness determines action, discourses determine action, and action creates materializations. Discourses thus guide the individual and collective creation of reality.”*

Maintaining Foucault's political commitment and concern with power-knowledge then makes Jäger's discourse theory “strictly a materialistic theory” (Jäger, 2002, p. 36) giving discourses an active role in creating material realities ‘sui generis’ instead of being reducible to mere ideology or second-order representations. By carrying knowledge, discourses at the same time impose power because they are capable of inducing human conduct and other discourses. Foucault is very clear about this coercive aspect of power as guiding and leading behaviour, distinguishing it from pure physical force:

*“Power is relations. Power is not a thing. It is a relationship between two individuals, and a relationship that allows one individual to conduct the conduct of another or to determine the conduct of another—to determine their conduct voluntarily according to a number of objectives that are his own.” (Foucault, 2014b, p. 240)*

Embracing these understandings of discourse and power, Jäger's (2002, p. 36) KDA is not only about the analysis of existing constructions and interpretations or even strategies and positionings "but about the analysis of the production of reality which is performed by discourse – conveyed by active people", giving a more agentic outlook to subjectivity than Foucault by recognising individual and group involvement in discursive struggles. For Jäger, such struggles are also *Deutungskämpfe* as struggles over interpretation and meaning with highly political ramifications. Consequently, my interest is not in the destructive, stigmatising or repressive actions directed towards those in "food poverty" but in the unequal relationships and interactions between volunteers and 'clients' and their social construction as distinct groups. They draw on available knowledge as 'free' subjects who can be "acted upon" to perform tasks, adopt particular understandings of the self and what food poverty means. My ultimate aim is an analysis in terms of government of those solving or suffering food poverty, that is the "the sense of determining their conduct on the basis of strategies, using a certain number of tactics" (Foucault, 2014b, p. 240) with powerful, hence real, effects.

Clearly, the materialist discourse theory informing KDA is fundamentally different from the dominant empiricism in discursive psychology, as all knowledge transported by discourse over time exercises power and is at the same time "the basis of individual and collective action and the formative action that shapes reality" (Jäger, 2002, p. 38), making it impossible to detach seemingly 'grounded' realities from the knowledge that creates and sustains them. Just as Hook (2001) condemns the fixation on textual effects and denial of materiality in dominant strands of discourse analysis in psychology, and Parker (2015a) warns against the depoliticising dangers of relativism, Jäger and Jäger (2007) problematise more specifically the failures to distinguish between textual and discursive effects: A single discourse 'fragment' such as a text or transcribed interaction then only has a weak discursive effect which is difficult to evidence compared to purely textual, immediately visible effects on immediate readers and speakers. Discourse 'strands', however, have a recurrent and lasting effect to create knowledge and normality over time requiring some account of intertextuality, that is tracing effects from

one discourse fragment to another over time in their production of truth. Jäger (2015) shows that discourses exercise their power over time with constant repetition and confrontation with similar statements to provide grounding knowledge for action and consciousness with a regulating function. Again building on Foucault, KDA is concerned with real battles taking place within relations of power, and therefore the social, and not the mundane empirical study of meaning-making through language:

*"Here I believe one's point of reference should not be to the great model of language (langue) and signs, but to that of war and battle. The history which bears and determines us has the form of a war rather than that of a language: relations of power, not relations of meaning." (Foucault, 1980b, p. 114)*

Like critics of discursive psychology, Jäger (2002, p. 37) too strongly opposes relativism in those constructionist approaches with "notions based in the magic of language that changes reality" where speech could be studied in isolation. He instead advocates a more inclusive approach that accounts for the mutual constitution of social reality and materiality where the exercise of power leaves an impact on reality as a non-discursive practice, defined as the non-linguistic techniques, installations and institutionalised rituals (Jäger, Schulte-Holtey, & Wichert, 1997) in specific settings. What makes KDA critical then is its key ambition to make otherwise hidden power visible (again) so it can be weakened:

*"Where there is knowledge, there is power. Where materializations exist, power and knowledge have been at work and continue to be so, since otherwise the materializations lose their meaning and rot. Power as such is not visible. Can it be made visible - perhaps in an indirect way or in the form of effects? All knowledge is, of course, linked to power. In all knowledge which prevails, power prevails. It is generated by power and exercises power. Thus, where there is knowledge, there is power. Where knowledge is weakened, power can be weakened." (Jäger, 2002, p. 60)*

These ontological foundations have major epistemological implications for how power effects of food charity can be studied, if food banks and other institutions are understood as materialisations of power-knowledge which are discursively constructed and maintained through human practice which assigns meaning based on culturally and historically available knowledge. As Jäger (2002) shows, if people stopped assigning meaning to these objects, they would effectively cease to exist in their current form. The critical task then becomes reconstructing flows of knowledge in the form of problematisations of food poverty (aim 1), making visible again materialisations or objectifications of said knowledge (aim 2) and showing how that knowledge produces subjects while imposing power effects (aim 3). A distinctive feature of Foucault's critical ethos is exactly this necessary 'unmasking' of otherwise invisible power to "turn it into a matter for reflection" (Olssen, Codd, & O'Neill, 2004, p. 42) out of which alternatives may arise. Materialisations will remain a central concern throughout the following chapters where my reconstructions aim to lay bare the power effects in food bank settings which have so far alluded analysis.

Finally, Jäger (1996) makes an important distinction between cultural and subjective relativism and aligns himself with the former by rejecting any "subject-centred idealism which claims that everyone sees the world differently [...] forced to construct his or her own view of things", a dangerous notion inviting a very different form of individualistic constructionism and apolitical relativism detached from power and history, which is in itself a political stance because it serves to maintain existing power relations while trivialising any alternative orders. Instead, KDA understands actors as members of discourse communities where assigning meanings is learned, passed on and manifested into 'truths' over time:

*"The individual does not make the discourse but the opposite tends to be the case. The discourse is super-individual." (Jäger, 2002, p. 37)*

Although single individuals are embedded into discursive practices and interwoven into discourse production which dictates the knowledge at their disposal, no single person or group ever has control over the end result, since "discourses have evolved and become independent

as the result of historical processes” (Jäger, 2002, p. 37). Despite emphasising some agency where actors learn to assign meanings with immediate effects for the constitution of reality, he remains vague about the precise capacity of the subject and extent to which single actors or groups can influence or disturb discourses.

### ***Discourse research as politicising activity***

While KDA provides a deeper theoretical grounding for a critical ontology, it also goes further by demanding an active involvement beyond discourse analysis. It is not content with simply highlighting inequalities and structural injustices, as critical discursive psychology appears to be, but inspires us to engage in discursive struggles to weaken and disrupt dominant flows of knowledge, and thereby power relationships, to ultimately overcome domination. It offers new political means (Jäger, 1996) against undemocratic developments “because it diminishes the feeling of incapacity over the dominance by hard facts and hard men, reduces the violence of capitalisation and instrumentalization of our everyday lives and living conditions” by enabling alternatives to fatalistic feelings and overcoming resignation to the ultimate truths propagated by elites. For Jäger (1996), the practical relevance of discourse research is also its main criterion for quality, measurable by the extent to which it contributes to a social science which not only leaves its ivory tower to get involved in social and cultural processes but also offers new ways of understanding and influencing these developments. New opportunities for engagement become possible because of the way discourses are understood as the ‘support columns’ of institutions to present much more fluid, fragmented and attackable targets compared to objectifications of power: While material capital and media remain in the hands of few, the world of discourse is open to re-imagination and can be seized for change by the masses. Materialist discourse analysis in general (Beetz & Schwab, 2017) must then resist the reduction of discourse to text in favour of a “non-reductionist analysis of the horrors of late capitalism” as a social critique, although such Marxist approaches remain unclear about the constitutive effects of discourse on structures and institutions. Here, KDA is not merely deconstructive but demands political intervention (Bartel & Ullrich, 2008) to pose new

challenges to discourse analysts: How can influence or change be possible by indirect intervention on thoughts and minds through *Deutungskämpfe* rather than static and all-powerful structures and capital? I therefore take seriously these critical elements in political involvement, not to produce one objective reality or truth, but recognising the struggle for interpretation in my aim to problematise and criticise knowledge of food poverty as *currently valid* knowledge claiming to be a universal, objective solution without alternative.

For Hook (2001, 2007), the material deficit in discursive psychology is still restraining the political potential of discourse research, making critical readings alone insufficient. Where KDA differs, however, is in its commitment to positionality and interpretative involvement by researchers: Without a seemingly objective genealogical distance, I am actively interpreting and intervening in discourse production where my own truth claims are not outside of power relations but constitute similarly ‘temporarily valid’ truths. Jäger (2015), like Foucault, therefore rejects notions of ideology and privileged versions of truth but emphasises that ethical values to which we bind ourselves as researchers (e.g. that all lives have equal value) are only temporarily valid, remain ever precarious and under potential threat, since they are themselves the outcomes of discursive struggles over time – and yet the analyst understands them to be true. However, Jäger’s position bears the danger of reducing the material world to a dead substance as mere inscription surface for human knowledge production (Angermüller, 2018a). Although Jäger is correct in asserting that objects lose their existence to us when humans stop assigning meaning to them, this ignores the productive powers of the material world placing constraints (Nightingale & Cromby, 2002) or otherwise shaping knowledge production. Taking into account these critiques of relativist arguments, the political concern with discursive struggles can still be maintained without refusing to take a position:

*“While discourse researchers cannot claim a privileged position that allows them to reveal a Truth that is hidden to others, there is no reason why they should not defend the ideas that they think are true, valuable*

*and coherent against those ideas that are of lesser value to them.”*

*(Angermüller, 2018a, p. 6)*

Not all knowledge across discourse communities then has the same value so that the task of discourse analysis becomes to investigate exactly how these situated practices make some versions of reality appear more true or valuable than others, and how their productions differs in quality or power interests. Indeed, Jäger (2002, p. 34) does defend normative positions but requires that these “are themselves the historical outcome of discourse” where my own position is therefore not somehow neutral or more true but “a position that in turn is the result of a discursive process” and outcome – i.e. another discursive construction – of my research. Consequently, I can only ever formulate provisional truth claims and may have to modify and defend my own position based on the values which I accept as true. Discourse analysis, after all, remains a discourse about discourses (Keller, 2018).

Again drawing closely on Foucault (1988a), KDA is concerned with discourse not just in personal interaction but the ways it becomes powerful by being institutionalised to ‘freeze’ unequal relations to the advantage of some, while excluding others “so that a certain number of persons get an advantage, socially, economically, politically, institutionally”. What counts as ‘good’ must then always be invented, defined and practised as a collective work and not be pre-determined by universal intellectuals defining what is true. In this study, my political ambition will be to make otherwise ‘frozen’ and seemingly natural categorisations and divisions between food bank ‘clients’ and volunteers mobile again to demonstrate the contingency and non-essentialness of charity practices whose power effects are obscured along with the historic origins of institutional rituals claimed to be natural expressions of care and community.



## ***From discourse to dispositive analysis: Implications for research design***

In contrast to the linguistic bias encountered in discursive psychology, KDA is equally concerned with the invisible/unsayable in examining conventions, symbolic practices, spatial arrangements and always linked to production of new subjectivities. Jäger (2015) shows how knowledge is located not just in linguistically performed practices but also in human action and material objects: Tacit or taken-for-granted knowledge is underlying even the simplest actions where it remains hidden but can be 'traced' to where some rationalities were made necessary or normal. Here, Jäger (2002, p. 46) defines non-discursive practices as “the active implementation of knowledge” in form of actions which were once informed by but do not necessarily produce new knowledge.

*“The tacit knowledge of a particular culture is passed on in non-linguistic practices and materializations. In other words, the knowledge is in the practices and materializations, and actors learn it by watching others and trying it out themselves.” (Jäger & Maier, 2016, p. 115)*

To account for these non-discursive practices and materialisations of knowledge at work in food charity settings and across public food collections, Jäger's (2002) reintroduction of Foucault's dispositive as the entire 'knowledge apparatus' is enormously useful and widens analysis to a critical ontology of food charity. Foucault defined a dispositive as

*“a thoroughly heterogenous ensemble consisting of discourses, institutions, architectural forms, regulatory decisions, laws, administrative measures, scientific statements, philosophical, moral and philanthropic propositions – in short, the said as much as the unsaid.”*  
*(Foucault, 1980a, p. 194)*

A dispositive further forms the 'net' between the different elements and has a strategic function in responding to historic need or social 'urgency'. Although not to be considered as

deterministic or all-powerful, dispositives present answers to a social urgency or emergency; they encompass the entire net of power-knowledge relations as “self-institutionalising or institutional answers to specific social problems” (Bührmann & Schneider, 2008, p. 93) such as growing demands for emergency food provision. This makes it impossible to rely on a critical reading of charity texts or even material displays, as such semiotic effort simply converts images back into text and thereby fails to appreciate the productive flows of knowledge that have gone into them to create material objects in the first place. Indeed, Jäger (2002) points out that we cannot rely on our own interpretative capacity but must draw on other sources to reconstruct the knowledge that has been invested in objects. Consequently, observations or purely visual analysis of food collection are insufficient to reconstruct the knowledge that has been invested in them.

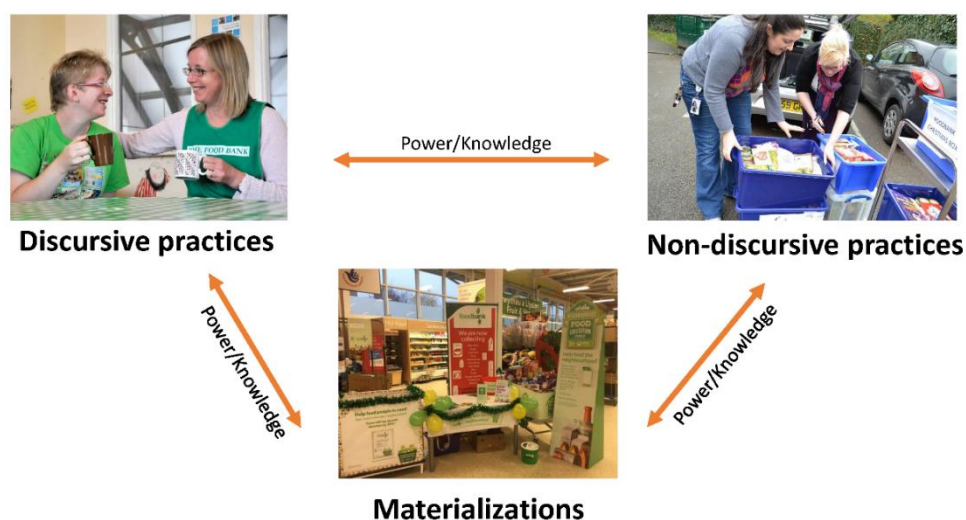
This is where KDA argues for an innovative extension of discourse analysis towards dispositive analysis which can account for the productive interplay between these elements with distinct power effects in the making of new subjectivities. Other recent contributions around the dispositive term have debated its contested definitions and problematic translations (Bussolini, 2010; Caborn Wengler, Hoffarth, & Kumiega, 2013) but point to an emerging consensus about the added value of extending discourse analysis to the non-discursive and material by including heterogenous, that is non-textual data sources (Caborn, 2007). Other writers (Brady, 2016; Rose, 2006) come to similar conclusions, while preferring the term of ‘assemblage’ to emphasise the creative, open-ended and contingent ensemble of both material and social elements. In their more comprehensive work on the added value of dispositive analyses, Bührmann and Schneider (2008; 2016) demonstrate how this research approach is radically different from the dominant scientific objectivism in psychology: As a flexible research programme, it offers guidance for empirical projects with different data types and research methods allowing insight into power effects and everyday practices of social actors, since

*“it is not the objects of research which determine the research perspective  
but the opposite: The dispositive concept forms the researcher’s gaze.”*

*(Bührmann & Schneider, 2016, pp. 19–20)*

With said ‘gaze’ directed at not just the discursive but also the non-discursive practices and materialisations which constitute food charity as social response, this study is then characterised by a shared “focus on research questions which aim to establish the relationships between discourse, non-discourse, subjectification and objectification in relation to social change” (Bührmann & Schneider, 2008, pp. 109–110). It carries an explicit concern with processes of subjection and subjectification where the aim of analysis (aim 3) is to show specific forms of subjectivity (e.g. being a ‘client’ or volunteer) to be historically contingent experiences tied to discursive and non-discursive practices (Bührmann & Schneider, 2016).

The ontological understanding of dispositives in KDA has crucial epistemological implications, since previously observed food collections and a corpus of visibilities will then have to be ‘discursified’ again (Jäger, 2015, p. 227) so that even practices and objectifications of the dispositive ultimately become part of any discourse analysis where it becomes possible to question their essentialness and challenge the knowledge that sustains them. While dispositive analysis allows actions to be observed from the outside as in ethnographic methodologies, “the point is how to reconstruct the knowledge that conditions and



*Figure 1 Food charity as dispositive (adapted from Jäger, 2012)*

accompanies them” (Jäger, 2002, p. 58) requiring critical attempts to recover the traces of knowledge that make possible and necessary certain materialisations and institutions like supermarket collections and food banks. For Bührmann and Schneider (2008), dispositive analysis aims to reconstruct precisely this hidden knowledge in materialisations to discover functions and effects in the dispositive, that is how they serve to create a range of possibilities and normalising practices where not everything can be said and done with them.

In this study, I understand the food charity dispositive (see figure 1) as a strategic response to problematisations (aim 1) in the ways in which food poverty as a phenomenon is made visible (aim 2) and governable. At the same time, it reproduces and modifies these problems through normalising practices and establishes symbolic orders to guide conduct (aim 2) and promote some solutions to food poverty while silencing others. Its analysis explicitly entails an essential focus on the production of new subjectivities as dispositives produce their own personnel (Keller, 2012) and form the symbolic and material infrastructure to provide normative guidance and orientation for conduct (Mayerhauser, 2015) and people’s moral-political existence across institutions and settings. My analytic concern is directed specifically at the links between elements and “the power relations that these strategically linked texts, actions and objects create” (Caborn, 2007, p. 116). Figure 1 illustrates in simplified form how discursive practices (e.g. conversations between ‘clients’ and volunteers), non-discursive practices (e.g. collecting and transporting donations) and materialisations (e.g. food collection points) together constitute food charity as social response, while creating new subjectivities. Since all elements are connected and co-constituted through flows of knowledge (Jäger, 2015), it is the relation between the elements and their power effects which must be at the centre of my analysis.

Bührmann and Schneider (2008) remain intentionally vague in promoting dispositive analysis as a research programme rather than method, and unfortunately Jäger (2015) offers equally little practical guidance for empirical studies. Admitting limited experience with dispositive analysis to date, his suggested five rough steps entail explorations of the knowledge

as the basis of discursive and non-discursive practices and materialisations, as well as determining the nature of the urgency the dispositive is responding to, along with any unintended consequences. Yet, he stresses that general “rules cannot and should not be prescribed” (Jäger, 2002, p. 56) due to individual needs and research interests, where instead “the most important thing is that the presented argumentation is stringent, rich in material and convincing”. On this basis, I now turn to situational analysis (SA) which provides more fully developed techniques which can fill these methodological gaps while remaining compatible with my outlined research design and philosophy.

### ***Situational analysis as a toolbox for critical qualitative research***

*“It’s a theoretical practice, if you will. It’s not a theory, but rather a way of theorizing practice.” (Foucault, 1988a)*

In previous sections I have outlined in some depth my understanding of discourse, power and materiality in relation to political research with new developments but also methodological shortcomings in critical discourse and dispositive analysis. This section builds on these foundations by introducing situational analysis which offers new tools and methods for studying the complexities of power and subject formation in the real world of food charity. Here, SA can be distinguished from other qualitative and discursive approaches through its analytic focus where research is about “interpreting the situation per se” (Clarke et al., 2017, p. 27) as opposed to a re-representation of some true experience, in a clear contrast to the realist studies documenting true experiences of food poverty examined in chapter 2. With SA, Adele Clarke (2003, 2015) critically reflects on decades of experience with grounded theory and its shortcoming to develop a comprehensive new research programme with strong roots in pragmatist philosophy, a commitment to the interpretative paradigm and feminist critiques and constructivist traditions in grounded theory. Moreover, unlike traditional grounded theory, SA reacts to post-structuralist debates and follows Foucault’s rejection of the ‘knowing subject’ in favour of a critical, reflexive, transformative and situation-specific social science.

Clarke (2015, p. 87) explicitly presents SA as a theory-methods package in recognition that ontological and epistemological assumptions are inseparable so that research becomes “a way of knowing and doing *together*”. The SA toolkit is comprised of three main types of maps alongside established methods in constructivist grounded theory, including memo writing, open coding and constant comparison. Three types of maps are created to systematically identify “the key elements, discourses, and conditions of possibility that characterize the situation of inquiry” where Clarke (2015, p. 100) is very clear that maps do not serve as outcomes or even representations of the situation but perform a purely analytic function in driving research design, data collection and relational analysis to uncover complexities. With an initially abstract or ‘messy’ map capturing all the potentially relevant elements, SA is especially well suited for multi-site research with comparative mapping and heterogeneous data sources including visual or multi-modal discourse analysis, allowing the inclusion of visual data of food collections (aim 2) alongside textual and even video sources documenting food bank practices.

The relational and spatial mapping in SA specifically serves to ground analysis while also working as a return to the social by drawing on Anselm Strauss’s social arena theory (Clarke et al., 2017): While abstract maps drive more in-depth analysis of the situation, social worlds and arena maps provide a contextual overview of the broader picture by mapping the collective actions and interests, institutions and organisations involved. Different social worlds, such as food banks or supermarkets, may therefore have their own power dynamics and groups with their own interests leading to potential conflicts and contradictions. As discussed in earlier sections, traditional discourse analysis in psychology remains largely detached from these diverse social realities by focusing on either ‘natural data’ (thus bracketing out anything beyond confined interaction) or distanced archival sources where situational analysis explicitly reconnects with Foucault’s critical ethos and post-structuralist ideas for an analysis of the complexity of social life within a given situation.

*“I try to analyze a real situation in its various complexities, with the goal of allowing refusal, and curiosity, and innovation.” (Foucault, 1988a)*

Whereas discursive psychology, even in its more critical forms, presents a constant danger of getting lost in fine-grained textual analysis and empirical description of verbal behaviour, social arena maps offer valuable orientation to relate back discursive activity to institutional practices and overlapping or conflicting interests and power relationships. Maps encourage spatial thinking and allow linking local power effects back to structural conditions and larger discourses outside the immediate situation. SA may therefore offer new alternatives for a critical social psychology which overcomes the artificial dichotomy between micro and macro constructionisms (Burr, 2015) where analysis constantly moves between ‘bottom-up’ and ‘top-down’ (Edley & Wetherell, 1997) since discourses adhere to no spatial boundaries “because social worlds are themselves “universes of discourse”” (Strauss cited in Clarke et al., 2017) and “constituted and maintained through producing and maintaining such discourses”. These divisions in discourse research seem especially non-sensical when considering that Foucault has always provided detailed analyses of practices while stressing the locality of knowledge and importance of space for the exercise of power: His forms of analysis, most visible in *Discipline and Punish* (Foucault, 1995), do examine the micro-practices of power and how governmental techniques “have become embodied in local, regional, material institutions” (Smart, 2002, p. 78) without being limited to state institutions and political bodies.

By using situational analysis, I aim to show how these “particular mechanisms of power become economically advantageous and politically useful” (Smart, 2002, p. 79) in a given place and moment in history. Where ‘dispositives’ remain rather abstract social machineries with unclear boundaries which can seem all powerful and deterministic, such closer look at the ‘messy’ situation allows disentangling its constitutive elements through detailed inspection of practices and involved and implicated actors while accounting for the significance of non-human elements. This is where SA explicitly takes the non-human into account (Clarke, 2015) by recognising the mutual constitution of reality through both human and non-human

elements. These insights and their methodological implications thus fill an important gap in Jäger's (2015) discourse theory which subordinates the material to human meaning-making. Clarke (2015, p. 95) usefully advocates a materialist constructionism where "nonhuman actants structurally condition the interactions within the situation through their specific material properties and requirements". Consequently, my analysis must account for the non-human elements and material conditions in which food charities produce knowledge, which is reflected in my second research question where I will explore the material arrangements, non-human elements and power effects at work in public food collections.

In many ways, SA already incorporates dispositive analysis by drawing on Deleuzian 'assemblages' and Foucault's use of the term but it also expands the link between discourse and situation: Inspired by pragmatist ideas and Strauss's work, Clarke (2015) understands social worlds as situation-dependent "basis for both individual and collective identities and for commitment to collective action" including the "predisposition to act". With others (Strübing, Keller, & Diaz-Bone, 2013) stressing the unexplored potential between SA and dispositive analysis, this leads me to expand KDA's definition of discourse where discourses can then be understood also as "historically and socio-spatially expanded situations". SA offers a valuable bridge between discourse analysis and larger infrastructures of knowledge production, as discourses become powerful when materialised and embodied by interpreting beings. SA further remains open to non-linear subjectification as messy, unstable and always unfinished relational processes where the exact relationship between governmental reason across discourses and situated subjectification becomes an empirical rather than theoretical task and something to be reconstructed, not imposed by a priori assumptions about the subject but by exploring how actors appropriate, negotiate, partially enact or resist discourses in everyday life (Keller, 2012).

Much like KDA, SA also makes claims of being an inherently critical research approach with political potential to link local, detailed analysis with global "networks of power, disaster capitalism, and neoliberal intrusions into every aspect of life" (Pérez & Cannella, 2015, p. 232).



Its critical ambition is achieved mainly through feminist and post-structuralist roots along with an explicit concern for power and absent or silenced voices. As Clarke (2015) explains, situational mapping is directly concerned with actors who are implicated in the situation by either physical presence and discursive silence or, conversely, physical absence and purely discursive construction by others. Where Jäger (2015) remains concerned with the purely discursive limits, Pérez and Cannella (2015, p. 217) emphasise the added value of situational analysis in considering multiple readings of the conditions of possibility in a situation with regard for the “exclusions and erasures of individuals, groups, concepts, knowledge, and perspectives”. Such concerns with silenced groups of food bank ‘clients’ and discursive construction through volunteers and expert agents in privileged positions are running through all my research questions where analysis will show the power effects and consequences of physical absence and truth-speaking on clients’ behalf.

Unlike grounded theory, situational analysis does not seek to build theories or invent new conceptual frameworks. Instead, it allows empirical and locally specific analysis of the workings of power rather than theorising power, thereby remaining very much in Foucault’s tradition:

*“The analyses of these mechanisms of power [...] is not in any way a general theory of what power is. It is not a part or even the start of such a theory. The analysis simply involves investigating where and how, between whom, between what points, according to what processes, and with what effects, power is applied.” (Foucault, 2009a, pp. 36–37)*

The purpose of relational mapping lies exactly in establishing the exact links and capacities for action between elements to explore where, how and with what consequences “power is applied” between which actors, groups or non-human elements. It is not about building theory as a universal explanation of food charity but a critical practice of theorising about what is at stake in its problematisations and prescribed solutions (aim 1), the normalisation of charity

(aim 2) and what the specific conditions of possibility are for producing subjects of food charity (aim 3) in specific settings.

SA thereby offers new ways of grounding discourse analysis without imposing discourse theory or looking for set subject positions as static templates (Keller, 2018). Its abductive reasoning (Clarke et al., 2017) requires constantly moving back and forth between data and theory to reflect on the writing process, recognise one's own theorising and possibly stopping and going back to the data to test and revise one's claims. Initial open coding is related back to theoretical concepts through constant comparison to identify variation and new aspects or contradictions as new, local and necessarily partial and situated knowledges (Haraway, 1988). Whereas other, supposedly 'Foucauldian' approaches to discourse analysis often impose a totalistic discourse theory reducing actors to mere 'puppets' on the strings of discourse (Keller, 2017) bound to fixed, pre-defined subject positions, this more grounded approach remains open to new and surprising findings while doing justice to the partiality and fragility of subjectification in post-structuralist thought. Although many of Foucault's concepts, including biopower and pastoral power, will later prove insightful for my own analysis, in following SA I am adopting a more cautious approach of these as 'sensitising concepts' (Blumer cited in Clarke et al., 2017) which direct me towards areas of inquiry without telling me what to find there.

Overall, SA then helps to direct my focus onto the "negotiation of discourses in social relations and interactions, on the generation of identities and subjectivities through discourses, and on the generation of Power/Knowledge, ideologies and control" (Strübing et al., 2013, p. 186) by food banks and partner agencies. Figuring out what is at stake in the formation of volunteers, 'clients' and donors as subjects of food charity then requires starting with how discourses, human actions and materialisations of knowledge are exercising power in a given situation to impose limits on reality and experience (aim 3) through problematisations (aim 1), the production of normality and symbolic orders (aim 2).

## **Taking stock and moving beyond discourse analysis**

In the previous sections, I have tried to demonstrate the need to look beyond the same old debates and conflicts around discourse analysis in psychology to argue for the added critical potential of materialist discourse theory and innovative methods in situational analysis. The inherent dilemmas with standardised ‘Foucauldian’ approaches, their lack of flexibility and rigid text-based analysis in prescribed steps or stages led me to explore different approaches where no single textbook approach could be chosen and applied without critical reflection. The result is a more tailored synthesis of ideas grounded in Foucault’s critical ethos attentive to the non-discursive and material elements in the exercise of power. Although Jäger’s (2015) critical discourse and dispositive analysis stays close to Foucault’s political project, it remains methodologically highly limited with almost exclusive focus on text-based corpora of newspaper sources commonly used to document the development of discursive strands over time. This chapter presents an argument for using Foucault’s philosophy (Morey, 1992) over his barely documented methods and inconsistently applied concepts, recognising instead the value of his work and legacy overwhelmingly in his philosophical approach to research as a problematising activity with a political commitment, both of which are quickly lost in traditional discourse analysis in psychology.

As shown with regard to materialisations and the political value of analyses, the need to look beyond the discursive does not require resorting to critical realism and its reification of static structures outside of discourse as supposed anchor points for more valid scientific or normative claims. Jäger’s reading of Foucault offers a convincing take on the discursive construction of reality where the non-discursive and material are vital parts of analysis, not isolatable but always interwoven through flows of knowledge, and hence discourse. His rejection of subjective relativism, linguistic empiricism and offered conceptualisations of discursive effects, history and collective struggles mean that many of the dangers and pitfalls of ‘post-modern’ psychology (Parker, 2015a) can be avoided. At the same time, this interconnectedness through flows of knowledge is also what is tying dispositive analysis to

established forms of discourse analysis and holding it back from much needed methodological innovation and critical reflection. Specific methods grounded in such Foucauldian traditions can therefore only be refined, experimented with and “developed in concrete research projects” that bridge the “existing gap between discourse analysis and empirical social research” (Jäger, 2002, p. 61). Jäger and Maier (2016, p. 135) explicitly encourage the combination of new methods requiring researchers to devote sufficient time and space for explicating “a thorough theoretical understanding that underlies their methodology and – on this basis – to innovate, adapt, mix and match the methods as it fits their research purpose” which I have certainly attempted within this chapter. Such solid foundation appears even more important given the theoretical deficit and disregard for power within existing food bank and poverty research (see chapter 2). Therefore, situational analysis offers me exactly this flexible toolkit of methods which brings together feminist contributions on partial and situated knowledges, post-structuralist rejections of the universal subject and a more grounded research programme as unfinished framework suitable for studying the complexities of food charity. The following section reports in detail on the actual research design, mapping and coding of visual and textual data where the value of the dispositive model remains in guiding the analytic gaze as a constant reminder of the interconnectedness of discourse, action and materiality in the production of subjectivities.

## **Neighbourhood Food Collections: Visual data collection and analysis**

Outlining the need for a critical visual methodology, Rose (2016) demands more attention to issues of social production and power, while existing qualitative visual research remains more concerned with meaning than with effects of images and ways of seeing and being involved in a visual culture. Here, discursive approaches understand visibility instead as being a product of the dispositive where “images appear in certain power-knowledge-constellations (dispositives), distribute visibilities in an intermedial interplay with texts or architectural structures, create political relevancies and enable the localisation of subject positions”

(Maasen, Mayerhauser, & Renggli, 2015, p. 19). Shifting away from orders of discourse and the range of the 'sayable' in the discussed Foucauldian approaches, dispositive analysis is then equally concerned with the ways light and attention are distributed (Renggli, 2015) with particular attention paid to how subjectivity first "has to be made, inasmuch as the apparatus [dispositive] allows it to come into being or makes it possible" (Deleuze, 1992, p. 161). Far from representing pre-existing objects, the question then becomes how a charity dispositive produces particular visibilities to sustain and legitimise its function of 'solving' food poverty by collecting public food donations.

By putting visual data "on the discursive agenda" (Reavey, 2011, p. 10) to bridge the "gap between the material and the discursive", the links between spatial arrangements and human practice sometimes neglected by Foucault due to his earlier focus on discursive orders (Mayerhauser, 2015) and disregard for mundane practices (Jäger, 2002) are explored as part of the dispositive. Since "different kinds of spaces also make possible different versions of agency" (Reavey, 2011, p. 9), images of supermarket food collection events allow me to investigate how food poverty is problematised and solutions are made visible in public spaces with consequences for available subjectivities. Including visual data in a multi-modal methodology further allows overcoming an exclusive text-based focus as recent developments in social media and digital communication present further opportunities for social research (Reavey & Johnson, 2008) where organisations like charities increasingly communicate using photos and other media adding a new dynamic to the situational creation of the self.

According to Tesco (2018), the first Neighbourhood Food Collection (NFC hereafter) took place in 2012 in collaboration with the Trussell Trust and in subsequent collections "49 million meals" have since then been collected. Upon entering the Tesco store, shoppers are greeted by volunteers at a collection point, given a leaflet as 'shopping list' and asked to buy and donate selected items when exiting the store. Over the collection weekend, volunteers from across the UK share photos of the collections on Twitter under the hashtag *#everycanhelps* to raise awareness of the event, recruit volunteers for local stores and encourage the public to donate.

As now annual events before Christmas, the NFCs present a vital source of food donations to food banks during a time of the year when demands are high and Tesco further ‘top-up’ donations by 20% through monetary donations to help food banks buy specific products and contribute to their running costs. According to the Trussell Trust’s (2017a) financial report, this Tesco top-up amounted to over £1m in 2017 so that NFCs now make up a substantial part of the franchise’s overall annual income of £6.6m. Yet, the events and their underlying fundraising strategies construct a very particular version of food poverty and have so far evaded critical analysis in the growing field of food bank research.

Although software packages such as NVivo now include functions to import and analyse Twitter data, recent limitations to the Twitter API mean that data can only be retrieved from up to seven days in the past and NVivo retrieves only textual data without images. I therefore used TweetArchivist, a commercial solution which monitors selected hashtags or accounts and saves all tweets from the moment of activation. After setting up collection for the *#everycanhelps* archive shortly before the collection weekend, tweets were collected automatically and I then exported the archive in spreadsheet format. Within the spreadsheet, I removed all names and locations of users to anonymise the dataset. Then, I copied all entries from the “media” column with the URLs to images into a separate text file. This file was then imported into a download manager which retrieved all 830 images in their original resolution. All images were imported into MAXQDA (v. 12) for initial analysis, after which I repeated the process for the following NFC in July 2016 (see table 1 below) which produced another 1092 images. Following in-depth visual analysis of both data sets in MAXQDA, I manually monitored the hashtag during the NFC in December 2017 to look for specific variation from the previous collections. From the live twitter feed, I extracted another 117 images which were also imported into MAXQDA for purposes of constant comparison (Clarke et al., 2017), since these showed images of ‘clients’ which were previously absent from the events. Collecting images from three different collections then allowed me to explore variation across time, since NFCs keep evolving and make use of different campaign materials each year.

Event (3 Days)	# of tweets collected	# of images collected	# of images coded (duplicates removed)
Neighbourhood Food collection December 2015	6424	830	685
Neighbourhood Food collection July 2016	6939	1092	920
Neighbourhood Food collection December 2017	Manual search	117	99
<b>Total</b>		<b>2037</b>	<b>1704</b>

*Table 1 Twitter corpus and images*

### ***Visual discourse analysis and mapping in MAXQDA***

In her comprehensive introduction to visual methodologies in the social sciences, Gillian Rose (2016) proposes two approaches to visual discourse analysis which broadly draw on Foucault's work along with elements from discursive psychology. Her "discourse analysis 1" approach is directly concerned with the ways images construct persuasive accounts of the social world and how objects are made visible/invisible in particular ways and is therefore potentially relevant to my second research aim. Her "discourse analysis 2" approach, by comparison, is less concerned with images themselves but more broadly examining institutional gazes and practices in relation to regimes of truth. Rose (2016) distinguishes between two approaches concerned with either construction of meaning through images, which by her own account ignores social practices and effects of discourse, and on the other hand another research tradition concerned more with articulations of institutional power and technologies which invite particular ways of seeing, such as museums. Despite admitting that these two approaches are not necessarily mutually exclusive, this dichotomy between meaning-making and institutional practice means that neither were fully suited for my chosen methodology. My study is concerned not so much with the meanings created by images of NFCs in isolation, but rather the reconstruction of social practices, discursive activities, positionings and materialisations at work during the collections which themselves take place in an institutional context. Nevertheless, her first approach provides useful guidelines as initial steps to begin a critical analysis and manage a corpus of visual data through coding, followed by relational analysis very similar to situational analysis, a process I will outline below.

Analysis then started with closely examining every element in the image and its interrelation with others by reading and re-reading images to become familiar and immerse myself in the data. After each collection, exported images from the Twitter feeds were imported into MAXQDA where I spent some time studying the images to identify the human and non-human actors involved, their interaction with other objects, any visible engagement in discursive and non-discursive practices and what else was ‘happening’ at the collections. Following Rose (2016), this initial phase was followed by a more systematic coding process to identify key discourses and recurring symbols across the images. During this phase, any materialisation of knowledge must be ‘discursified’ (Jäger & Maier, 2016, p. 113) again “by dividing it into its constituent parts” and tracing its origins: A dissection of seemingly mundane objects such as shopping trolleys or banners can show their productive function in the situation through coding with regard to its discursive effects, uses by humans and power effects (e.g. guiding actors by providing instructions). For each image, I therefore used the selection tool in MAXQDA to drag a segment (e.g. a person) to the appropriate code for later retrieval. Guided by the dispositive model, I began to code the discursive, non-discursive and material elements in each image along with available subject positions, that is different roles for volunteers, store staff and members of the public.

Initially broad labelling with codes such as “collection point”, “donations” or “texts” however soon proved to be insufficient given the complexity of the situation, so I began to inductively create new codes for newly emerging elements and organised these in a hierarchy of codes (e.g. Subjectivity/Volunteers/Children volunteers) which I rearranged throughout. Despite the large number of images, coding of visual data does not have to be exhaustive here (Rose, 2016) in identifying every single version of each element across all images, and I have certainly not coded every single food item or trolley across the 1704 images. Instead, coding was more about exploring the range of possibilities for action and visible versions of food charity with explicit consideration for the persuasive effects of discourse: What are the different claims of truth or ‘natural’ categories of clients, donors and volunteers and how they are made visible?



What practices are enabled, promoted and expected as ‘natural’ conduct for shoppers, volunteers or staff? Absences, invisibility and silences were therefore just as productive and relevant as what was made visible and presented as normal. Segmentation of the situation through coding itself then served as a reconstructive effort to make visible again the human creativity<sup>3</sup>, physical efforts, discursive strategies and symbolic interaction that have gone into materialisations of food charity.

An initial list of codes then led me to consider possible connections and relations between discourses, which I recorded as memos for each sub-code. As shown in figure 2 below for example, segments of images coded at “Neighbourhood” could then be retrieved from the entire corpus to create a subset of images to compare and contrast how references to neighbourhood are made visible through different objects and practices. Starting with initial descriptions of the different constructions of neighbourhood, I then created a memo attached the code which I updated as I progressed through the retrieved segments. Through constant comparison, I kept looking for anything ‘new’, unusual or contradicting my initial findings in the following analysis and although data from the NFC in 2016 added substantial innovation, the standardised use of Trussell-branded items with the same texts across nearly all CPs meant that towards the end of analysis few new insights were gained. While theoretical saturation is a problematic concept in discourse research, I did not feel that collecting more images would have added to the analysis at that point, so that I only selectively monitored and manually extracted an additional 117 images during the final NFC which utilised new banners with quotes attributed to ‘clients’ which had so far remained absent.

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<sup>3</sup> For example, some CPs were individually decorated, and volunteers could be seen playing music and dancing, giving out free cake and sweets or wearing colourful costumes in a range of non-discursive practices.

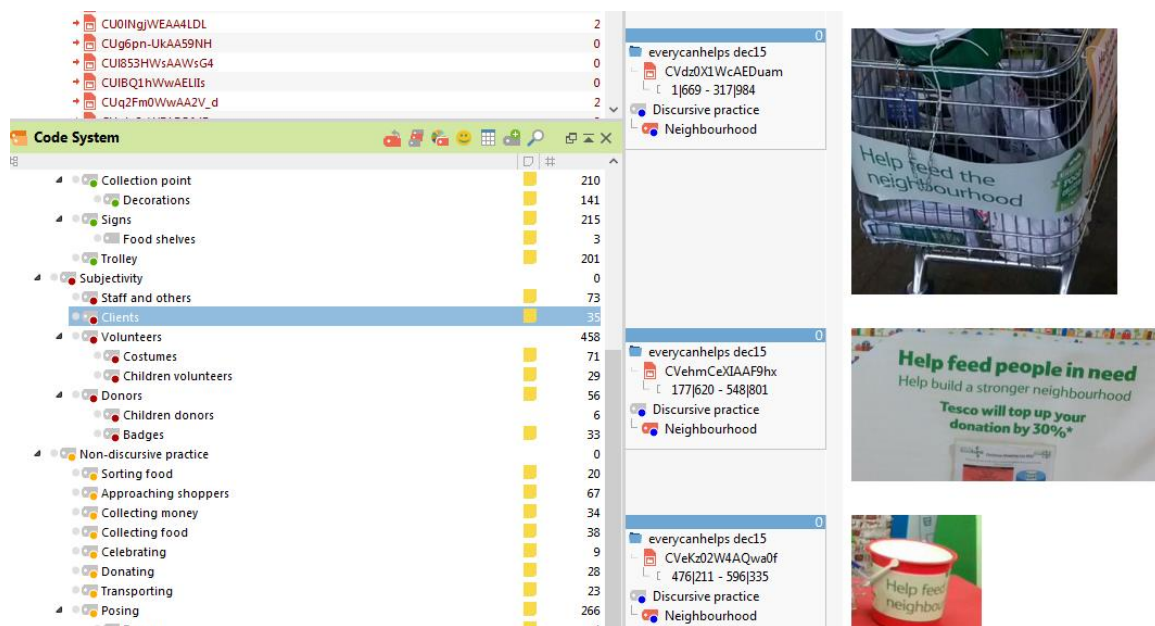


Figure 2 Coded image segments in MAXQDA

Following the coding, I carried out more in-depth analysis, initially for image segments under each code separately and then in relation to other segments. Building on Rose's (2016) proposed questions for visual discourse analysis, I also drew on guiding questions for situational analysis with visual materials by Clarke et al. (2017) and a more general sensitivity for issues of power and normalisation demanded by a critical ontology. These included (see appendix C) versions and effects of the discursive objects, truth effects and guidance of conduct, implications for subjectivity including responsibilities and consequences for refusal, material artefacts and their possible uses, and finally a critical reflection on overall visibility and wider social consequences. Through a series of coding queries, I explored other relations between elements, revealing for example the importance of material elements in directing shoppers by finding images of CPs without volunteers. I recorded any insights from coding queries in memos, exploring for instance the different positionings and engagement in practices, showing how collection points were vital for guiding encounters at store entrances.

Following the systematic coding and memoing of all sets, I turned towards the different mapping techniques in situational analysis to drive further analysis and subsequent data collection. In situational analysis (Clarke, 2003, p. 559) 'messy' abstract maps "lay out the

major human, nonhuman, discursive, and other elements in the research situation of concern and provoke analyses of relations among them”, thereby challenging what is often taken for granted and accepted as ‘normal’. Using the MAXMaps feature in MAXQDA, I dragged all 36 existing codes onto an empty map in no particular order, although colours indicate the main coding trees. This helped in visualising the complexity of the situation and going back to the images I once again looked for elements I had missed so far.

Relational maps are crucial in situational analysis for investigating the actions and power effects between human and non-human actors: By starting with one element (e.g. “volunteer”) I drew lines in MAXMaps (see figure 3) to each other element in turn, considering the opportunities for action, restraints and constitutive dynamics. For example, this showed that volunteers were closely connected with almost every element as central figures, whereas ‘clients’ were only connected with very few elements and remained physically absent from the collections. Considering the directionality of relations was crucial here, as I used arrows in MAXMaps to indicate how material objects were created by some actors and practices, but also in turn had an active role in carrying some discourses and directing shoppers no different from human actors. Missing links between elements were equally insightful, showing how some practices were exclusively performed by volunteers or staff, clearly limiting what was doable and sayable in the given situation. Exploring these relationships and positionings, I recorded all observations within the appropriate memo linked to the code. By right-clicking on an element, I could also retrieve an overview of all coded segments at that code across the entire data set to explore its relationship with other elements. Considering these relations between elements helped me avoid premature judgments and challenged possible preconceptions based on my initial impressions from the visual data.

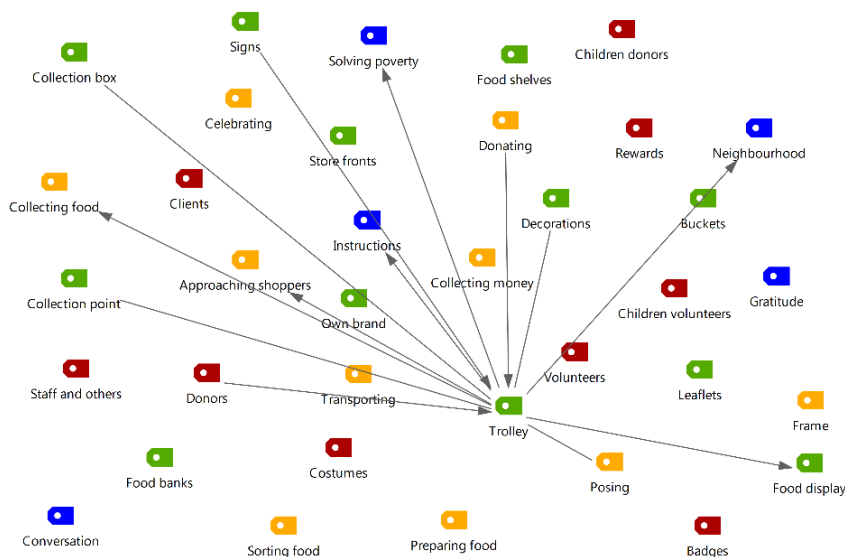


Figure 3 Relational map in MAXMaps

Finally, I converted the ‘messy’ maps into ordered maps adapting Clarke et al.’s (2017, p. 181) template (see Appendix B) to create effective inventories of the situation whose ‘neatness’ aided in writing up findings and are further useful when “we want to be sure we have not overlooked or forgotten some relation”. Overall, mapping proved to be an iterative and highly time-intensive process, where I created several versions of maps throughout analysis by updating previous ones with newly found and absent elements. Maps are further useful for guiding data collection and refining research questions where, following initial analysis of the NFC in 2015, I began to refine my research design with supplementary documents and planning my own interviews to fill gaps in the data and gain more direct insights into food bank practices.

### ***Supporting documents and videos: Collection and analysis***

Recognising images as ‘social sites’ (Rose, 2016) assuming particular audiences, visual analysis must also locate possible conflicts, contradictions, possible alternatives and absent images and meanings by drawing on other supporting data sources. Tesco and their partner food charities FareShare and the Trussell Trust have created a range of campaign materials, documentations and advertisements for the annual NFCs. Videos specifically produced for their Youtube channels were valuable data sources, as they provided moving images from the

collections along with volunteers' and clients' recorded testimony. Moreover, they show some of the background processes including what happens to donated food items once they leave the store and reach the food banks. Searching the organisations' Youtube channel and website, I identified, downloaded and transcribed 11 short videos (see figure 6 below). To be included, documents had to make direct reference to the NFCs and offer potentially useful narrative data.

<b>Document type</b>	<b>Source</b>	<b>Details / Rationale</b>
11 Videos	5 Tesco (Youtube) 6 FareShare (Youtube)	Short documentaries and interviews with staff, volunteers and clients
9 webpages	Tesco  FareShare  The Trussell Trust	Various campaign pages and advertisements for upcoming collections, including background information on (monetary) donations
2 Volunteer Briefing Packs 2015 & 2016	FareShare	Manuals made available for potential volunteers with instructions for how to conduct themselves
Advertisement for NFC in Tesco Magazine December 2015	Tesco	A full-page ad in a customer magazine including information on corporate partnerships and client case studies

*Table 2 Supporting documents*

These were then coded using the existing code system and Clarke et al.'s (2017) questions for analysis narrative discourses to memo each paragraph of the transcript and again linked these to the codes. Then, I went through the same iterative mapping process by duplicating abstract maps in MAXMaps to identify all relevant elements through constant comparison by moving from one document to another. Again, ordered maps provided valuable overviews which I then compared against the visual data for additional insights. By retrieving coded segments and accompanying memos from the documents, e.g. volunteers speaking about their experiences, I could later synthesise and compare analysis against the visual data for the final write-up.

## **Interviews: Access, selection and ethics**

Whereas the visual and documentary data from NFCs offers insights into visible problematisations of food poverty, offered solutions through public donations and positionings of clients as volunteers, my research aims demand a more specific focus on institutional practices inside the food bank, including how donated items are put to use and what power dynamics emerge within the situations. Semi-structured interviews based around open questions exploring food bank practices, definitions of their client base and questions around the nature of food poverty then provided rich data on these discourses and situated practices. Interviews were further crucial for exploring the range of “More than Food” services which were presented as more long-term solution in addition to food aid across materials at the NFCs. Here, the food bank’s links with partner agencies, their guiding problematisations, underlying interventions and the roles of volunteers and advisors as experts could also be followed up in depth.

From September 2016, I first made attempts to negotiate access by sending out emails to Trussell Trust food banks and FareShare distribution centres in the area but none of these emails received any replies initially. Then in October 2016, a manager of a Trussell food bank replied to explain how their food bank was “entirely run by volunteers” and “particularly struggling to maintain the service with current levels of volunteer help” and therefore unable to make any additional time available for research. While ethnographic researchers commonly gain access by volunteering themselves, given my research interests this was not a viable option and I also had concerns over losing a critical perspective when working directly for the food banks. Instead, I attended several regional meetings of food poverty networks with local charities, food bank managers, church groups and council officials. At two meetings, I was first approached by an independent food bank manager and later spoke with two senior project managers of the Trussell Trust, exchanged contact information and arranged an interview at their central warehouse location. Finally, a Trussell manager at a large food bank in North

Yorkshire replied to my email in February 2017 and I visited them for an interview the following month. Interviewees and sites are summarised in table 3.

By attending the networking meetings, I was further able to make contact with project managers who are in the most senior position at the food bank and oversee a number of distribution centres across the city. Initial interviews at Smallville FB with two volunteers provided little insight compared to the in-depth interview with the manager who was in a much better position to comment on issues related to my research questions. Also, volunteers are often inexperienced, only take part in a limited range of activities (packing parcels or picking up donations) and only work at the food bank sporadically, whereas the project managers are in full-time positions and fully engaged with all operational aspects of the charity. These project managers are in an expert position with excellent knowledge not only of their own operational practices but also the policies of the Trussell Trust, and after some preliminary analysis I decided that no additional interviews with volunteers were necessary. The small number of interviews (see table 3 below) necessarily places some limits on findings: Focusing on single expert interviews with managers does not provide any insights into experiences or motivations for volunteering or possible variation in problematisations between individuals. However, my research focus is on the ways problematisations are translated into institutional practices and intervention strategies. Although I do examine the active role of speakers, I am more interested in how dominant discourses are put into practice with power effects in the local settings.

<b>Food bank (Anonymised)</b>	<b>Location</b>	<b>Type</b>	<b>Number of distribution centres</b>	<b>Interviews (length)</b>	<b>Notes</b>
<b>SMALLVILLE Food Bank (SFB)</b>	Rural town in North Yorkshire	Independent food bank (Baptist church)	1	1 Manager  (54 mins)  2 volunteers  (13 mins + 30 mins)	No formal partnership with the Trussell Trust but working closely with CAP
<b>LAKETOWN Food Bank (LFB)</b>	Large city in West Yorkshire	Trussell Trust	12	1 Project manager  (1h 13mins)	Big warehouse in industrial location
<b>WESTMARCH Food Bank (WFB)</b>	Large city in North Yorkshire	Trussell Trust	4	1 Project manager  (1h 30mins)	Based in community centre

*Table 3 Food bank sites and interviews*

Situational mapping of the interview data quickly highlighted the importance of various partner organisations involved in the delivery of “More than Food” services, so that I collected, transcribed and coded 11 short videos by Christians Against Poverty (CAP) for added insights into delivery practices, job clubs and clients’ reactions to receiving a food parcel.

After careful consideration I decided not to interview so called food bank ‘clients’ for a number of practical, ethical and political reasons. As shown in chapter 2, interviews with clients are popular in case study formats to offer insights into their lived experience of food poverty and reasons for their ‘crisis’. However, my research interest lies in the formation of ‘client’ and volunteer categories in the first place, particularly the ways client subjectivities are constructed through volunteers speaking on their behalf, assigning roles, duties and responsibilities in the process. Existing research, however, continues to ignore both these constitutive dynamics in the formation of client subjectivity and researcher’s own role in the production of academic knowledge. Given my own privileged role as researcher I did not want to become complicit in this kind of truth extraction, where, given the academic demand for



useful data, 'clients' would once more feel obliged to tell their personal stories and explain their genuine need, thereby re-constituting themselves as worthy clients of charity. Critical reflexivity in psychology (Parker, 2015b, p. 26) must involve these considerations of how "our objects of study are configured by us as subjects who are willing to speak to the experts" and how any newly produced knowledge may support and keep in place powerful structures and dominant practices. One of my research aims, however, specifically seeks to destabilise and show the contingency in the subjection of 'clients' of food charity. So although interviews may have provided some insights into possible resistances to available positionings and more active roles in non-linear subjectification (Bührmann & Schneider, 2008), this would have come at significant cost as it is exactly the ritualised confession (Foucault, 1978) of referral reasons and performance of 'genuine' poverty that I am aiming to problematise. Here, client testimonies in collected documents and video segments still allow some insight into the ways 'clients' are made to speak and formulate truths about themselves in relation to normative expectations and possible experiences at the food bank.

These considerations have remained on-going concerns throughout the entire research process where my decision not to interview clients was reinforced by a personal experience when my interviews at SFB were interrupted when two clients had walked in after being referred by the local job centre. Both remained standing near the door and looked visibly distressed, uncomfortable and reluctant to enter. Throughout their visit, they appeared extremely anxious and left as soon as the manager got their food parcel. Observing this exchange and the visible emotional distress only reinforced my concerns where asking 'clients' to participate in an 'interview' would only add to their stress and cause additional anxieties in fear of having to prove their eligibility and explain the genuine nature of their claims. Similar encounters with distressed 'clients' have been documented by ethnographers doing research inside food banks where Garthwaite (2016a, p. 32) reports that "each new encounter felt like I was somehow intruding on a very personal and private moment in people's lives", flinching at "at people's nervous embarrassment" and watching "people's dignity slipping away as they

asked if I could give them sanitary towels or toilet rolls to go in the parcels”. In addition to my ethical concerns with participating in these dynamics, I did not believe that ‘clients’, selected and referred through volunteers, would be free to speak about any sensitive issues and possibly negative experiences of food charity. The existing power dynamics, the reliance on the referral regime and the discursive expectations of demonstrating worthiness in relation to those in positions of authority therefore prevented me from collecting data from clients directly. There is also a more fundamental dilemma here about the assumption underlying most qualitative food bank research where speaking about one’s experience of poverty is seen as essentially liberating and countering dominant discourses. As shown in chapter 2, however, a Foucauldian critique of the repressive hypothesis and humanistic conceptions of the liberal subject (Simons, 1995) must reject these assumptions and explore instead what happens when ‘clients’ give an account of themselves to constitute themselves as worthy subjects of charity. The situational power dynamics and discursive and material environments in which these practices are based in that are therefore essential parts of my analysis.

### ***Textual analysis and situational mapping***

There continues to be a lack of consideration for effective and appropriate coding approaches in critical discourse studies, whereas new developments in software for qualitative analysis offer flexible and creative new ways for data management and detailed analysis depending on the needs of the project. Existing literature on discourse analysis offers little guidance on coding beyond the identification of recurrent themes and keywords (Tonkiss, 1998) or broad attempts to label discursive strategies and consequences (Willig, 2014). Gill (2000, p. 179) usefully suggests an inclusive approach that avoids fragmentation of data where coding becomes only the initial step of analysis as “way of organizing the categories of interest” before carrying out more in-depth discourse analysis. Keller (2001; 2013) strongly advocates adopting elements from grounded theory for discourse analysis, including coding, memoing and constant comparison, to avoid imposing bias where traditional discourse analysis often looks for, and subsequently ‘finds’, pre-defined subject positions and social practices based on

a priori assumptions. As Keller (2017, p. 22) argues, Foucauldian discourse research should instead allow the “open, heuristically nuanced tracing of problematisations” to generate new insights and allow interesting, surprising findings. This combines more ‘grounded’ analysis with explicit analysis of structural conditions, institutional contexts and actors’ practices and strategies within power-knowledge regimes.

Sharing these concerns, my initial coding of the interviews served to organise and immerse myself in the data, while creating an initial overview of the different, potentially conflicting or overlapping problematisations of food poverty at work (aim 1). These included the various constructions of food poverty by managers/volunteers, any definitions of problematic aspects in clients’ lives and identified factors behind food bank use. Led by my third research question, I further coded the various speaking positions setting out the roles, normative expectations and responsibilities for all key actors including volunteers and ‘clients’. Here, I also follow Keller’s (2012) advice to go beyond static positionings through discourses and consider social actors as actively involved in specific subjectifying practices: I specifically explored the different ways volunteers interact with ‘clients’ and reflect on their own experience, where they can take up multiple, partial positions and interpret and put into practice dominant discourses using the knowledge, contextual setting and material resources available to them. At Westmarch FB, this revealed instances where the manager was at times actively challenging and even resisting referral policies and assumptions about ‘clients’ lacking financial skills.

During the process, however, I quickly noticed that much of the interviews covered more practical issues about the food bank’s operation, local partnerships with businesses and logistical issues. Therefore, I inductively added a series of sub-codes to include these institutional practices. Given my interest in power effects of interventions (aim 1), I also created sub-codes for rationales underlying interventions, including eligibility criteria and disciplinary mechanisms. As with the visual coding, this proved to be an iterative process where I built up, and constantly revised, the coding hierarchy by comparing interview segments against existing codes and creating or merging codes as necessary, noting any

changes in appropriate memos. After having coded all interviews, however, I felt that the inclusive 'broad brush' approach made it difficult to identify and compare different problematisations across the three sites. Consequently, I recoded all problematisations by creating a series of sub-codes such as "health", "housing", "universal credit" and more personal issues around individual "crisis". A full and final coding frame for all interviews can be found in appendix A.

Whereas SA encourages open line-by-line coding based on constructivist grounded theory, I felt that this fragmented my data too much and did not help me categorise and order the data for further analysis according to my research questions. As a compromise, I went through each interview paragraph by paragraph, coding relevant segments where MAXQDA allows adding data memos in the margin next to the coloured coding stripes for easy retrieval where I also linked memos to codes. When retrieving a single code, this meant that I could also retrieve all linked memos across the entire data set. I used these memos to note initial impressions and thoughts but also for more in-depth analysis based on Clarke et al.'s (2017) questions for narrative discourses. Alongside the coding and memoing, I again used the MAXMaps feature to create an initially 'messy' abstract situational map with all the codes and other potentially relevant elements from each food bank site. Next, relational maps for each site helped me explore possible power relations which also showed the importance of supporting actors, partner organisations and logistical infrastructure. The main insights gained here were in the complex material flows of donations: The maps for Smallville FB made me realise the wide range of outside organisations involved in both referring clients to the food bank and collecting and distributing food parcels, including churches, GP surgeries and schools. This is where situational analysis extends discourse analysis to consider not only flows of knowledge but also the material flows and non-discursive practices which support, enable or restrict institutional practices in the government of hunger. Further memos linked to each relational map helped me consider the nature or absence of links between actors, including missing links with

‘clients’ who remained largely isolated, while volunteers were in privileged positions making decisions and interacting with agencies on clients’ behalf.

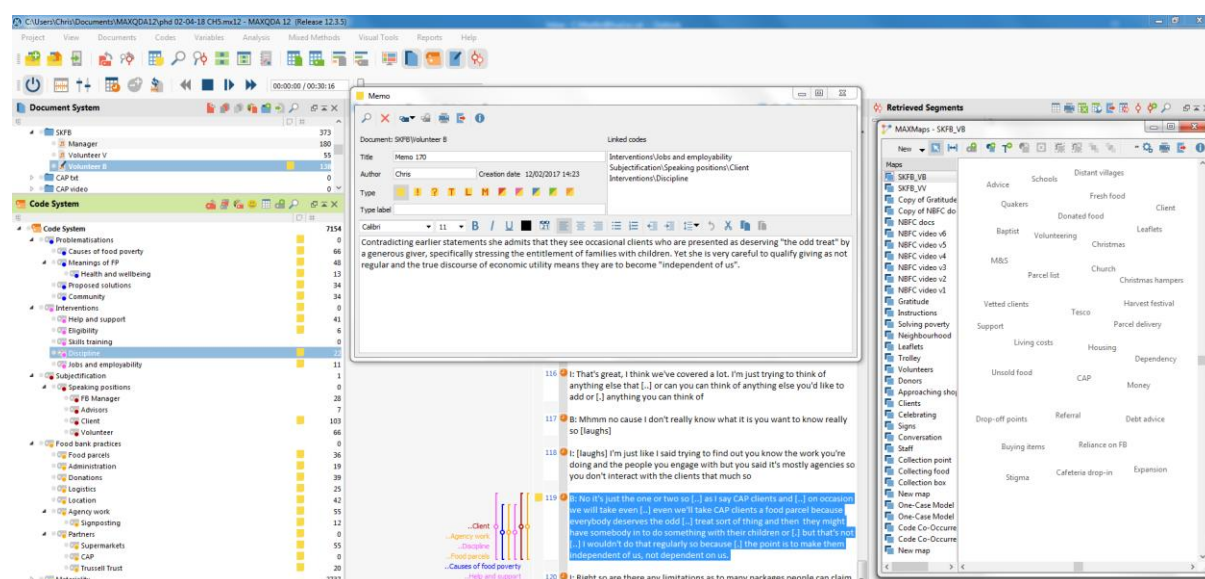


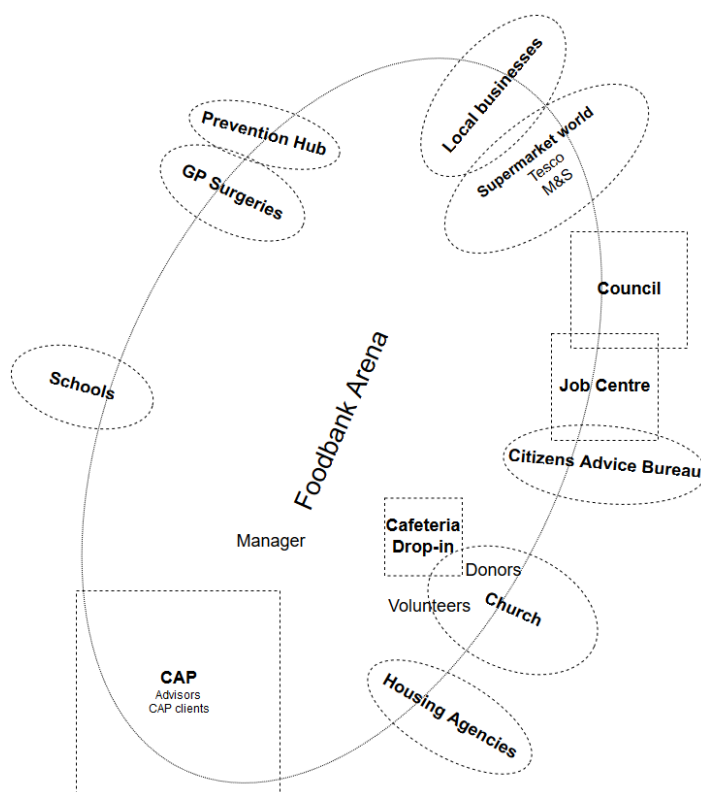
Figure 4 Codes (left), memos (top), data (centre) and abstract map (right) in MAXQDA

Next, ordered maps provided useful overviews but also drove further analysis by considering the different discursive constructions of ‘clients’ at each site, along with the dominant problematisations and self-positioning by staff. Ordered maps therefore perform an important function as inventories of the situation or what Jäger (2002) refers to as the discursive limits imposed on reality. They help identify the range of the sayable and direct attention onto silences, absent actors, implied assumptions and their consequences for the constitution of subjects. Furthermore, ordered lists of discursive constructions and non-human elements were valuable for later comparative analysis between all three sites which revealed important differences in how the food banks were collaborating with local councils and job centres.

## ***Social worlds/arena maps and comparative mapping***

Another key tool in situational analysis is the social world/arena map (see figure 5) which provides a contextual overview of the broad picture as a “return to the social” by mapping collective actions, institutions and organisations involved in the situation. Crucially, all neighbouring and potentially overlapping social worlds are equally recognised as universes of discourse with their own power dynamics, knowledge production, interests and potential

conflicts. The mapping of partner organisations including advice agencies, supermarkets and other businesses then shows how dispositives work through the active, possibly contradictory negotiation of opportunities, constraints and deployment of available resources in addressing the problem of food poverty. The social worlds/arena maps were also useful aides in writing-up findings, as they help “determine which stories to tell” (Clarke et al., 2017, p. 162) but also made me relate any textual analysis back to social groups and power dynamics, avoiding a fixation on discourse in texts.



For each social world, I created a separate memo considering its role, interests and functions in relation to the food banks. Initially, I pieced together a social arena map for NFCs based on integrative mapping (Clarke et al., 2017) of the various ordered maps which guided my further data collection of documents and videos to explore in more depth the roles of the supermarkets and partner charities. However, the maps also force prioritising some social worlds over others

which highlighted some limitations of this study: Although the arena map for SFB showed key roles for partner agencies such as CAP in delivering food parcels, additional interviews proved unfeasible due to practical constraints in light of the amount of data I had collected already. So, although the maps can be instrumental in focusing research design and guiding data collection, this requires considerable flexibility and resources, especially in an institutional context where access has to be carefully negotiated subject to approval by ethics panels.

Finally, based on the arena maps and ordered situational maps for the NFCs and three food bank sites, comparative mapping (Clarke et al., 2017) allowed me to compare and contrast what elements were present or missing in each, or only some and not other data sets. This further enabled comparison of discourse positions, that is how ‘clients’ are talked about for instance, and what authorities are involved in the delivery of interventions across the different sites. Other important differences also appeared in organisational setups, with Laketown FB drawing on a wide network of business partners, whereas Smallville FB relied on local institutions in a rural setting. Conversely, the similarities in discursive constructions were striking between the independent and both Trussell Trust food banks all sharing dominant problematisations.

## **Initial reflections**

### ***Ethical considerations***

In addition to the discussed ethical reservations about interviewing ‘clients’, the collection, storage and analysis of social media data required careful considerations to ensure data protection and anonymity. Although I had initially planned to conduct my own observations at NFCs, this proved unfeasible within the given timeframe due to demands by the School Research Ethics Panel (SREP) which required written prior permission from the supermarkets and charities, where my physical presence as non-participant also could have led to disruptions at the events held near busy store entrances. Full ethical clearance for the study was then granted by the SREP. All collected images and documents were retrieved from

publicly available online sources and I immediately deleted any personal information, including names, location and twitter handles from social media data. Although all images were available via public twitter hashtags, users did not explicitly consent to taking part in a research project and I have therefore removed all identifying features and blurred faces in any reporting, including conference presentations.

For the interviews, I sent out an information sheet which clearly laid out the background of the research and participants' rights before briefing individual participants. In accordance with BPS guidelines, I produced bespoke consent forms and informed all participants about their rights to confidentiality, withdrawal and data usage before gaining their consent and permission to record the interviews. During the interviews, I was very aware of my position as an outsider and sought to minimise disruption to internal routines of the food bank by agreeing a suitable time in advance and conducting the interviews in quiet areas without disturbing 'clients' through my presence. To minimise my own impact as 'colonial' researcher extracting data from the setting (see chapter 2), I designed open questions (see Appendix D) to allow managers and volunteers to critically reflect on their own practice without imposing any value judgment. Following the interview at SFB, the manager sent me an email to thank me for giving her a chance to pause and reflect on what had become her daily routine, indicating that she and her volunteers clearly benefited from the experience. All interviews were encrypted and stored securely, and then transcribed and fully anonymised in MAXQDA, removing any references to places or other identifying features.

### ***Reflexivity***

Already implicit in the considerations above is also the recognition for critical reflexivity in discourse and dispositive analysis (Bührmann & Schneider, 2008) and any situational analysis (Clarke et al., 2017). The analytical process in SA requires and specifically encourages reflexive practices from the outset and throughout analysis, for example in memoing (Pérez & Cannella, 2013), and I have included reflections on this process throughout the chapter. Keeping a research journal for recording personal observations has also helped me make sense



of my own interview experience, as I found myself sympathising with the manager at WFB who reflected much more critically on her own practice and the political position of food banks. Traditionally, however, Foucauldian approaches have problematised notions of reflexivity (Rose, 2016) based on subject-centred accounts which often take the form of confessions (Parker, 2005, 2015b) to report on the author's biography and personal choices. In recognition that discourse analysts do not stand outside the discourses they are analysing, Rose (2016) then recommends some modesty in analysis which replaces traditional reflexivity and must demonstrate internal coherence, trustworthiness and provide detailed evidence from textual and visual data, which I have attempted above.

For Angermüller (2018b), discourse analysis itself functions as reflexive critique which produces valuable knowledge with the potential to contribute to the reproduction of social order and material hierarchies. The key point for me then becomes to reflect on the role and impact of my produced knowledge, especially given the lack of reflexivity in existing research. Rather than produce more evidence of food poverty in futile attempts to influence policy, or yet more useful knowledge helping to reform or expand food charity, this thesis aims to highlight the limits imposed on the realities of volunteers, managers and 'clients'. With my analysis, I hope to reconstruct this tacit knowledge and make it mobile and contestable again to open up space for transformative innovation. A non-normative position (Hansen, 2014; Triantafillou, 2012) refuses to prescribe reforms but seeks to cultivate reflexive doubt and re-politicise seemingly common-sense solutions. Building on some evidence of resistance and contestation at WFB, my role as researcher is to encourage this doubt and demonstrate how in food banks discourses become materialised to shape the conditions of possibility for thinking and acting upon poverty. Sharing research findings at future network meetings or conferences may allow me to remind food bank volunteers of the possibility of otherness and sensitise them to the power effects of discourses in their everyday practice to explore alternatives to their current position as conduits of neoliberal governmentality (Waring & Martin, 2018).

## 4 Neighbourhood Food Collections: ‘Every can helps’?

Since 2012, Tesco have been organising Neighbourhood Food Collections (NFCs hereafter) at all their superstores across the UK to collect food donations for the Trussell Trust and FareShare who then distribute or prepare the food across their food banks and other outlets. Over an annual collection weekend, customers are asked to buy extra items, mainly durable canned and boxed items, and then donate them to the charity at the collection point (CP) set up near the store entrance. In addition, Tesco pay out a 20% monetary top-up to both food charities based on the weight of donations. All collections are carried out by volunteers who are recruited by the charities through online and social media campaigns, where volunteers also share photos of the events under the hashtag #everycanhelps. Having downloaded and analysed 1704 of these images over 3 collection weekends between 2015 and 2017, this chapter sets out to explore how food poverty is problematised at the NFCs, how charity is made visible as solution and what the implications are for forming new subjects of food charity.

Drawing also on a range of supporting documents, videos and testimonies by participants, this dispositive analysis aims to reconstruct the knowledge invested in collection practices and materialisations (Jäger & Maier, 2016) to demonstrate that these are in fact outcomes of a normalising power which imposes limits while presenting seemingly natural and common-sense solutions to a social urgency. Understood as an assemblage of heterogeneous but interrelated elements (Keller, 2018), the food charity dispositive mobilises human and non-human actors, such as texts, displays and other material objects as a strategic response to poverty. As a social problem of urgency, food poverty is then problematised and constructed as a phenomenon requiring worldly intervention. The dispositive concept therefore extends discourse analysis to address the necessary infrastructures of knowledge production in the “symbolic and material resources” (Keller, 2018, p. 27) which enable, support and normalise discursive practice over time. NFCs will be shown to provide such infrastructures in which food charity is made visible, knowable and actionable not just in discursive but also highly symbolic non-discursive practices that are no less vital for the functioning of charitable

responses. Analysis will further emphasise the active roles of volunteers, donors and other involved actors in bringing the charity discourse to life and taking up available subject positions. Yet, self-positioning by volunteers and recipients will also demonstrate the contingency and potential divergence from offered positions, as dispositives can guide conduct and impose visibilities but do not always produce the desired subjectivities.

Beginning with an in-depth description of collection points (CPs) and practices throughout the stores, these will be shown to materialise a neighbourhood discourse which problematises hunger, rather than poverty, to elicit generous responses while any causes, conflicts or political responsibility are rendered invisible. Whereas volunteers, staff and donors are all activated to perform key functions in the dispositive, 'clients' as recipients of food gifts remain physically absent and excluded from consumption. When given a voice by the charities, 'clients' are positioned as grateful recipients and enrolled in their own recovery through a medical discourse that problematises individual conduct and assigns responsibility for solving these crises by following expert advice. Placing emerging findings in the context of consumerist spectacles and critiques of corporate food charity, I will extend these debates by highlighting the productive features and unintended social consequences of food charity in guiding consumer conduct and creating new spaces for localised government of poverty to argue for a critical ethos capable of interrupting the normalising power of charity.

## Collection points: #everycanhelps



Figure 6 Collection point



Figure 7 Collection points

At all larger Tesco stores, collection points (CPs) are set up at the entrance where shoppers are greeted by volunteers, given a leaflet and asked to buy one or more of the designated items to donate them as they exist the store. Across the country, CPs are largely made up of the same material elements: Banners and pop-up displays carry the Trussell Trust franchise's recognisable green colours along with corporate logos and in between the displays, a range of

suitable food items are placed on tables next to leaflets given to potential donors as ‘shopping lists’. Shopping trolleys are strategically placed in pairs and one is often filled with donations to make visible the generosity of previous shoppers, while the other remains empty to invite further donations. Wearing highly branded tabards in green or red franchise colours, volunteers take up different positions at the CPs, either standing behind the tables and trolleys or more actively approaching shoppers by handing out leaflets. Some CPs are heavily decorated using colourful balloons, bunting or seasonal Christmas decorations as a multitude of promotional displays compete for shoppers’ attention when they enter the store. Despite all CPs being set up in this general manner using materials supplied by the Trussell Trust, there is considerable variation in the scale of collections depending on store size, number of volunteers available and creativity involved, as some existing supermarket aisles are merely transformed by placing the display in front of them and adding an instructional note next to price tags.

The strategically placed food items presented at the CPs are exclusively made up of long-life items packaged in tins (including beans, vegetables, meat, fruit and milk), boxes (e.g. tea, juice, mashed potatoes) and bags of other ‘cupboard essentials’ such as pasta, sugar or cereal. While often lined up in an instructional display on tables, these ‘suitable’ food items create a much more powerful visibility as they are placed in huge piles and stacks in front and around the CPs showing food in abundance. Here, it is clearly not ‘food poverty’ or scarcity of food more generally that is being problematised but rather a lack of charitable conduct. Being faced with an overwhelming generosity when entering the store, an emotional appeal is made to shoppers to contribute a small part to an already impressive amount of donated food, giving credibility to its truth status in solving poverty.

### ***Neighbourhood discourse and quantification of generosity***

With food displays dominating the CPs, large yellow price tags are placed in front of the food crates to distinguish them from regular in-store promotions. Given the familiar placement of such promotions near the store entrance, considerable discursive efforts are necessary to

distinguish CPs from ordinary promotional displays and to resignify shopping for one's own benefit to a charitable act of purchasing a food gift in a larger effort to solve hunger. To achieve this, the highly visible displays, banners and signs are constituted by discourses of neighbourhood and feeding the needy:

*"Help feed the neighbourhood*

*Please take a shopping list. Buy the item and pop them into the donation bin. Tesco will top up all of your donations by 30%\*. Thank you #everycanhelps"*

*"Buy to donate and fill your neighbourhood with hope"*

*"Help build a stronger neighbourhood"*

This neighbourhood discourse transforms all material elements involved in the collection to turn ordinary supermarket objects like shopping trolleys designed for private consumption into functional elements of the food charity dispositive. Highly visible at the entrance and on signs throughout the store, these appeals for "help" address shoppers directly and provide a simple 'nudge' where "every donation" is constructed as an act of helping to "feed people in need" promising effective and immediate impact. Moreover, filling the collection bins and shopping trolleys with donations is equated with filling "your neighbourhood with hope" and transformative effects for the entire neighbourhood. Derived from Tesco's own slogan, the #Everycanhelps hashtag used in social media campaigns further adds credibility to the events and helps make every donation into a material and spiritual act of kindness where collective efforts, made visible in the existing stacks and trolleys full of donated items, constitute building "a stronger neighbourhood" as community and charitable conduct are presented as universal solutions to hunger.

This neighbourhood discourse is also at work in the online reporting of the events by the Trussell Trust:

*“We are thrilled that the UK’s largest supermarket shares our vision that no one should go hungry, and is working with us and FareShare to empower local communities and fight poverty.” (FareShare, 2015a)*

Despite the rare reference to “poverty”, otherwise missing in the visual data from the collections, the charity positions itself as visionary but does little to outline this vision beyond a common platitude condemning hunger. Here, hunger becomes a manageable symptom of poverty to be addressed through partnership with influential institutions such as the “UK’s largest supermarket” where a causal link is only implied between poverty and hunger but the causes of poverty remain unknown and unspoken. Conversely, where neighbourhoods remain weak and shoppers fail to adopt charitable conduct, those “in need” will remain unfed and without hope. This emphasis on “feeding” establishes a crucial visual link with the arranged food displays where the decision to “buy to donate” one of the items provides the charity with the means to feed those identified as being in need. Following the instructions and donating generously hence promises shoppers membership as useful members of an imagined community of empowered givers where a symbolic sense of neighbourhood and social cohesion can be restored. In return, gratitude is given on behalf of those members identified as “in need” who remain voiceless, absent and passively in need of emergency help from those retaining consumer status.

This neighbourhood discourse and its construction of togetherness and shared responsibility to feed those in need is often combined with equally universal truth claims about the impact and success of collections:

*“Thank you for your donation. Today we’ve collected 756.7kg. During this collection event the total amount collected so far: 2207.80 kg /  
Emergency food for local people in crisis / 116 crates”*

As volunteers are pictured proudly holding up numbers on handwritten signs, the quantification of donated volumes serves as success story and output to be celebrated, while

offering reassurance to volunteers that their efforts have yielded tangible results. Again, converting the weight into an estimated number of meals provides a more relatable image of “emergency food” reaching those in need. As the underlying problematisation is hunger and lack of food, not poverty or lack of money or other resources, the charity dispositive responds by offering a positive sum game in which *any* donated volume and *every* donated item is something to be celebrated and to be grateful for regardless of actual need. Constructions of “emergency food” further stress the temporary nature of help without the need to measure actual outcomes or accounting for sustainability.

On their websites, both FareShare and the Trussell Trust use these estimated figures as a measure of success and to thank their donors:

*“The food donated by kind-hearted Tesco customers over these three days equates to more than 3.7 million meals, which will be split between FareShare and The Trussell Trust. This collection takes the total number of meals raised for people in need since the Neighbourhood Food Collection began in 2012 past the 30 million mark.” (Trussell Trust, 2017b)*

The quantification of donated food serves to reinforce the truth status of charitable action as meaningful impact and celebrates the sheer volume as expression of the community’s generosity and kindness. By contributing and adopting charitable conduct, shoppers are positioned as useful and “kind-hearted” customers doing their part for providing meals for “people in need”. It further puts donations of a single item into context through the powerful imagery of 30 million meals which must first be “raised” through the collections, again assigning responsibility for solving hunger to community and generous giving. The visibility of provided “meals” together with reported numbers in the millions assures donors of the effective and adequate impact of their donations, diverting attention from the visibly basic types and quality of food items: Since *#everycanhelps*, any donated tin becomes part of a nutritious meal and vital contribution to feeding millions. The display of numbers makes



visible the success of the event as a measure and celebration of generosity but does not scandalise the extent of need, nor does it make visible the material realities of poverty.

By presenting a universal charitable solution to the problem of hunger these discourses render invisible any other versions problematising poverty, inequality or simply a lack of money to buy everyday items. In making visible impressive amounts of donated food and instructing shoppers to ‘feed’ a neighbour in crisis, shopping for the invisible and voiceless poor reinforces the truth status of food charity where the poor cannot be trusted with money directly but simply require ‘feeding’ by a generous community member. As will be shown in the following sections, the charity dispositive presents a solution to a social problem of which it is its own architect. It does so by forming its own subjects as generous, highly visible givers and distant, but always grateful, worthy recipients in crisis.

### ***Materialisations of food aid: Knowledge made visible and powerful***

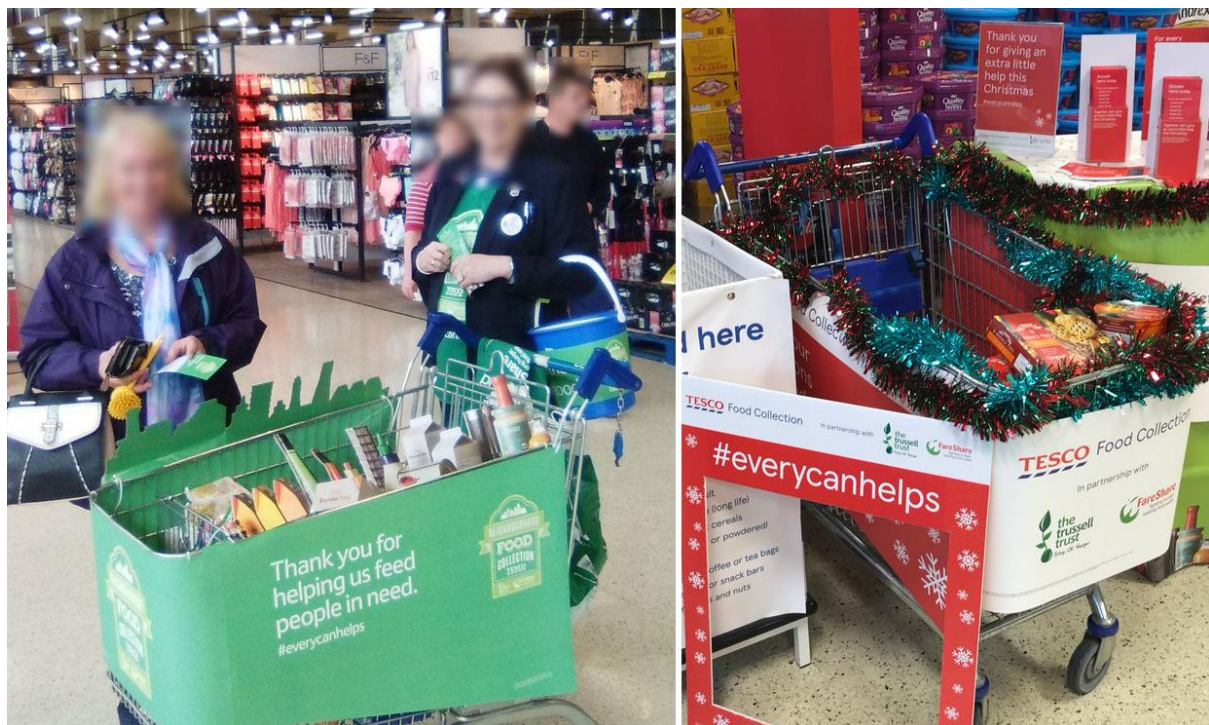
In addition to the analysis of discourses and non-discursive practices, dispositive analysis demands a specific concern for materialisations or objectifications of knowledge and “how humans subjectify themselves through the use of things” to question what their roles and power effects are (Bührmann & Schneider, 2013, p. 30). The materialisation of discourses forms a social process which can stabilise knowledge over time by giving it a visible and enduring presence, making certain ‘truths’ into unquestioned natural certainties of symbolic and material orders to guide actors in their everyday practices (Bührmann & Schneider, 2008). In the situation of inquiry, power always “operates on the field of possibilities in which the behaviour of active subjects is able to inscribe itself” (Foucault, 2002e, p. 341) in the form of visible objects, spaces and other “permanent structures” which then in turn shape the conditions of possibilities for action. The following section will attempt to reconstruct some of this ‘tacit’ knowledge (Jaeger & Maier, 2016) invested in material objects and tools put to use at NFCs to examine their functions in the dispositive.

At the CPs, branded signs and display stands are constituted by and themselves become material carriers of discourses of neighbourhood to provide instructions promising to feed the needy and solve hunger through generous giving and symbolic restoration of hope in the community. Placed in central locations and decorated to maximise attention, the displays stand taller than most volunteers and are designed in the same green colours as their tabards. Featuring a leaflet holder, they can even stand in for human actors to appeal to donors and issue instructions. In many cases, CPs function without any human actors, as the material food arrangements and displays make the neighbourhood discourse visible and provide necessary instructions for the dispositive to function. Once the neighbourhood discourse has been at work to create material objects, they take on a visual presence of their own and exercise their own truth effects (Rose, 2016) by directing shoppers, while the knowledge that has been invested in them is no longer visible. As non-human actors, trolleys and other objects speak within the same discourse as volunteers to guide shoppers with the aim of maximising donations.



*Figure 8 Collection point with trolleys*

Placed alongside tables and display stands, shopping trolleys perform a number of important functions. Arranged in pairs, they ‘reach out’ like human arms to shoppers entering the store and often point in the direction of the CP to capture attention and demarcate a charitable space within the store. Signs are attached to all trolleys inviting approaching shoppers to “Help us feed people in need” while reassuring them that “Every donation will help feed people in need” combined with more direct instructions to “Donate items here”. These visible constructions of ‘feeding’ and use of the NFC logo make the trolley into a carrier of the charity discourse and transform it from an object of private consumption into a destination for selfless giving and feeding the needy. Filled with basic items, its visual presence evokes powerful connotations of family shopping and calls on bypassing customers to participate in the collection. Empty trolleys allow filling “your neighbourhood with hope” and promise immediate emotional gratification to donors by placing an item on top of piles of previously donated food.



*Figure 9 Shopping trolleys*

As familiar objects to shoppers, trolleys (see figure 9) become carriers of discourse and transport knowledge across space and between actors as they mediate the material exchange between donors and volunteers: Generally, donors do not give food directly to volunteers as

they exit the store but place them in one of the trolleys or collection bins. This immediately visualises individual contributions as donated items disappear among others in the trolley, also presenting a valued photo opportunity where donors are frequently pictured standing behind trolleys holding bags of shopping just before dropping them off. As donors gain the ability to position themselves as generous givers contributing a small part to larger community effort, this also allows volunteers to function as bystanders and trusted facilitators of the exchange between donors and absent recipients. Collection bins are set up around the CPs and made to carry the same instructional discourses as the trolleys and display stands promising to “Help build a stronger neighbourhood” and often featuring a list of suitable items. Constituted through the neighbourhood discourse and giving purpose to donations by promising to “feed people in need”, the bins do not require human interaction to function but become independent carriers of discourse with a key role in making food charity visible.

Overall, the main function of CPs remains in creating a field of visibility to induce charitable conduct and provide instructions to guide shoppers through the steps of a material exchange from taking the leaflet to dropping off a donation. In addition, volunteers actively collect monetary donations holding out collection buckets which are equipped with the same signs and logos asking shoppers to “help feed the neighbourhood”. In reinforcing this notion of feeding, there is a tacit implication that all money will go to the charity in support of their efforts to feed the needy. As the underlying problematisation of hunger demands the donation of food and provision of meals by dedicated charities, giving money directly to recipients becomes unthinkable and remains unspoken. Informed by historic constructions of the unworthy poor (Lister, 2004; Romano, 2017) as recipients unable to spend money responsibly, an imperative to feed the needy becomes the only visible solution.

Indeed, at some CPs donation buckets are placed at the floor next to a trolley full of food with a sign making an emotional appeal to “Please help us raise £50 to pay for this trolley full of food”. This raises an otherwise taken-for-granted issue of ownership as the food displayed at the CPs still belongs to Tesco and must first be purchased before it can be given over to the

charity. In both cases, either by buying an extra item from the shopping list and then donating it or donating money directly, Tesco stand to benefit from the sales as more consumerism is encouraged and needed since *#everycanhelps*. Yet, the frequent reference to the 20% monetary top-up by Tesco serves to anticipate accusations of profiteering from the events and to reassure customers of purely charitable intentions. As valued partner in the events, Tesco's actual profits, including sales figures over the collection weekends and symbolic benefits and improved corporate image, remain unchallenged along with more fundamental issues of food as private goods to be purchased and donated by individual consumers.

Finally, the material arrangement and visual-discursive presence of CPs creates spatial divisions between charitable area and the store as consumer space more broadly. Despite the insistence that *#Everycanhelps*, there is often a sharp contrast between the illustrated display of basic food items, predominantly from Tesco's budget brand, and more expensive 'luxury' goods in the background, including tobacco and promotional offers for alcoholic drinks. Yet, since the charity dispositive forms a response to hunger, *any* basic food item becomes a valuable contribution and something to be grateful for from their position of worthy poor. In contrast, anything outside the pre-selected range of basic items on the 'shopping lists' requires consumer status or becomes another rare treat to be grateful for.

## **The (dis)positioning of volunteers**

### ***Self-positioning at collections: Putting discourses into visible practice***

As shown above, materialisations are invested with meaning through discursive and non-discursive practices and only maintain that meaning in the dispositive for as long as it is being assigned by human and non-human actors (Jäger & Maier, 2016). Non-discursive practices entail all the "symbolically charged ways of acting" (Bühmann & Schneider, 2008, p. 48) and gestures which can support, renew or change a given discourse but whose main function is to transport knowledge and put it into action. This section will therefore explore the range of non-discursive practices actors engage in at the CPs and their role in the interplay with



discourses and material objects. Firstly, the range of symbolic non-discursive practices which volunteers engage in will be critically explored, including how they actively implement dominant discourses in a complex interplay with material tools and spaces to perform their function as personnel in the dispositive to make food charity visible.



Figure 10 Volunteers greeting shoppers



Figure 11 Costumed volunteers at entrance

Although CPs can still function without human actors, it is through supporting and highly symbolically charged practices that volunteers make use of the available material objects and (partially) adopt, live out and put into practice these dominant discourses in the dispositive (Keller, 2012). Standing near the CPs at the store entrance (see figure 10), volunteers approach shoppers with a particular body pose (see figure 12), smile and use of material tools where their brightly coloured tabard clearly identifies them as part of charity organisation and sets them apart from Tesco staff. Leaning forward, they hand out leaflets to customers as something to be accepted and thanked for, which is often followed by the shopper glancing over the leaflet and listening to a volunteer explaining the purpose of the collection before moving on. The ‘shopping list’ given out as leaflet becomes a vital tool in making initial contact and simplifies the discursive efforts necessary, since each leaflet contains all the necessary instructions and serves as a reminder when customers continue with their shopping.



*Figure 12 Volunteer approaching shopper*

While volunteers generally appear as seemingly homogenous group identified by wearing the charity’s uniform tabard, some participating organisations are seen with custom tabards and different shirts to display their affiliation with corporate groups like Lloyds Banking or the Sage Foundation where the collection events are used as a volunteering and valuable PR

opportunity. Gathering around the CPs, groups of volunteers are diverse in ethnicity, gender and age and include senior citizens and young children. The inclusion of children is particularly noteworthy, since children are predominantly tasked with approaching shoppers as they enter the store to hand out leaflets and collect money, engaging them in conversation and allowing an emotional appeal which is more difficult to turn down coming from a young ‘adorable’ child, often dressed in a colourful costume. When interviewed for a promotional video by an adult volunteer about their participation at the collection, two Brownie girls explained that:

*G2: “Well we're trying to help people who haven't got any food to get 3 days worth of [...] and collecting food for Christmas for people so we're giving out leaflets [...] You feel happy because you know they're gonna get their food for Christmas.”*

After initially echoing the Trussell Trust’s policy of giving out 3 days’ worth of food parcels, ‘collecting’ food for Christmas is adopted as main rationale. Being denied access to alternative problematisations of poverty, participating children are invited to put into practice the charity’s heavily sanitised and depoliticised construction of hunger where ‘feeding’ constitutes the solution and those ‘in need’ deserve “their food for Christmas”. For children, active engagement with shoppers and receiving smiles and gratitude in return for handing out leaflets offers feelings of happiness without any ambiguity or doubts about the good nature of the event. As food charity becomes normalised and offers moral positioning through a ‘halo effect’ (Poppendieck, 1998), alternatives are rendered absent and unimaginable while ontologically reifying poverty as natural event affecting “people who haven’t got any food” without reference to structural causes or discursive processes at work in constructing the ‘needy’ as a distant and simply less fortunate group.

In addition to the various decorations put up around the CP, volunteers put great creative efforts into visualising the events as fun and enjoyable by creating a welcoming and festive atmosphere. By triumphantly holding up tins and bags of food or posing with outstretched



arms while giving thumbs up or raising their fists, they symbolically convey a sense of success and reinforce the notion where every single item constitutes a worthy contribution to be celebrated. Together with donors, volunteers frequently pose for pictures using a large rectangular photo frame (see figure 13) made from cardboard which features a silhouette of buildings (the ‘neighbourhood’) above the recurring slogan *#Everycanhelps*. By holding it up in front of their heads, volunteers get to ‘frame’ themselves and become the central object and focus of attention as key organisers claiming credit for the successful event. The posing with donors and Tesco staff, frequently seen hugging each other, makes visible a sense of togetherness in a joint community effort and blurs the boundaries between organisations and their interests. In fact, at many CPs volunteers become indistinguishable from Tesco staff and vice versa, since many staff members wear the same tabards and are only identifiable by a small Tesco badge or lanyard.



Figure 13 Adult and child posing with photo frame

In advertising and posing with piles and stacks of Tesco's own-brand products at the CPs, volunteers effectively take up a similar position of salespeople but market food in a different way, not as affordable essentials needed for cooking basic meals but as key elements of the charity dispositive, as necessary acts of ethical consumption in a community effort to end hunger. Whereas volunteers enjoy and present physical closeness with staff and donors as a close-knit group, the 'needy' remain isolated at a distance and required to have their needs defined and voiced by volunteers as trusted proxies. The presence of senior staff and Tesco executives in suits posing for pictures at the CPs further lends authority to the charities in a public and highly visible endorsement that serves to position the supermarket as community member fulfilling its social responsibilities.

In more practical but nonetheless essential supporting practices, volunteers are also tasked with the dating, sorting, and transporting of donations from the store to the food bank. Since these activities continue behind the scenes and remain invisible to shoppers, volunteers take photos of these logistical efforts picturing staff and volunteers carrying heavy crates and loading them onto vehicles for delivery. While these images reinforce the notion of successful events and generous giving, they also perform an important function in assigning responsibility and temporary ownership of the food to the charity to reassure donors that their contributions are delivered to those in need by a highly professional and trustworthy network run by hard-working volunteers. Physical and symbolic activities such as these are essential non-discursive practices which, once informed by discourses including economic rationalities informing the weighting of food and calculation of a 'top-up' by Tesco, are learned and enacted by volunteers and continue to support and renew existing discourses within the dispositive. In combination with the discursive quantification of donations discussed above, symbolic celebrations make food charity visible as an enjoyable community effort yielding impressive results, whereas human misery and desperation, deprivation and other material aspects of poverty remain invisible.

By giving visibility instead to charity as universal solution through symbolic practices and spectacular displays, volunteers position themselves as successful collectors of food and show their gratitude on behalf of the absent poor. As capturing and steering attention becomes key in diverting shoppers' attention from consumption towards charitable giving, volunteers are also seen wearing colourful costumes ranging from Christmas outfits to popular movie characters and in the shape of food items like bananas, pizzas and tomatoes. With the exception of the latter, none of these are directly related to food or poverty but serve instead to create a festive atmosphere, further allowing volunteers to make these into fun and well-spirited events. More specifically, costumes of popular children's characters (see figure 11) are used to approach children accompanied by their parents as they enter the store. In return for handing the donations directly to 'Mickey Mouse' and 'Daisy' characters before leaving the store, children are offered sweets by the costumed volunteers and invited to pose for pictures along with their parents. Although the visual data does not allow any insights into how parents explain the context and purpose of the collection to their children, it seems unlikely that the interaction with the dancing and celebrating characters will leave either group with lasting concerns or questions about the nature and causes of poverty. The only visual experience and knowledge of poverty available is that of a festive display of generosity and happiness on the side of the givers, where hunger is being managed by an active community through efficient self-care, making any political debates and activism obsolete.

### ***Offered subject positions in documents & websites***

Next, the positioning of volunteers across the charity websites and supporting documents and online campaign materials will be explored through a critical analysis of the discursive constructions and power effects at work. Here, subject positions are understood as the available positionings and interpellations which assign normative expectations for conduct while offering possible identifications, speaking positions (Keller, 2012) and the management of one's own moral location (Arribas-Ayllon & Walkerdine, 2017) while giving authority by speaking the truth and assigning responsibilities for others.

An online appeal by FareShare (2017) was part of the campaign to recruit volunteers published weeks before the collection event, offering a direct link to register with the collection at a local store by entering a postcode and choosing a timeslot.



*Figure 14 "Let's be heroes against UK hunger"*

The appeal positions volunteers as “heroes against hunger” accompanied by a comic (figure 14) showing ordinary people as superheroes with masks and capes holding up collected basic items of rice, sauce, tuna, pasta and coffee as weapons “to fight hunger”. Hunger is anthropomorphised as faceless enemy to be fought by a heroic ‘team’ of volunteers answering the charity’s call to arms. In return, this heroic role only requires giving up three hours of personal time in an economic exchange where time is a valued resource to be converted into a marketable commodity. It does not mention that volunteering and civic engagement are unpaid activities more likely to be taken up by members of the middle-class who can afford to give up free time. The superhero role provides a familiar image for aspiring volunteers, not associated with systemic social change but individual achievement through use of naturally given abilities and the selfless idealistic commitment to community. The attempt to mobilise turnout for the NFC further promises and visualises effective results where basic items are turned into “five hundred meals for people in need”. The construction of recipients as “people in need” that was evident throughout the visual data here objectifies hunger as a condition to be alleviated solely through free giving of food and time. Rendering invisible the causes of hunger and failing to problematise a lack of money or adequate income, no reasons are given

why “8.4m million people” cannot afford to eat as the figures serve to illustrate the need for heroes as morally superior group leading the community: Recipients are then made into a passive, vulnerable and homogenous, distant ‘other’ group in need of saving whose fixed needs and entitlements are pre-determined by volunteer-consumers.

Finally, in targeting “UK hunger”, the appeal employs a banal nationalism (Billig, 1995) of providing food for British people “from Land’s End to John O’Groats” in a nation of needy recipients as fellow citizens. With frequent reference to “local people” across the charity documents and displays around the CPs, this division promotes a model of ‘neighbourhood’ tied to nationality, geography and membership of a distinct cultural community that prioritises charitable giving in contrast to other charities helping the distant poor in developing nations. Despite attempting to mobilise a wide charitable response to a nationwide problem, it remains based at a local level without ever making poverty into a political issue requiring actions at national level, firmly within the boundaries of a neoliberal technology of empowerment (Cruikshank, 1999) advocating self-help by caring neighbours in an imagined community.

On the same website, FareShare (2017) advertise worthwhile reasons for volunteering:

*“Take part in a worthwhile event with a team of friends at your local Tesco store, challenge each other to see who can collect the most food.*

*Have the opportunity to play an active and positive role in your local community by encouraging people to donate. Invite your friends, family, colleagues, neighbours, sports club, book club (any kind of club) to take part in an engaging and worthwhile event.”*

Just like the visual instructions at the CPs, the simplicity of the events is emphasised along with their practicality in achieving an immediately visible contribution, as opposed to often difficult, time consuming and boring political activism where actual results are thought to be rare. Drawing on a neoliberal discourse of competition, volunteers are encouraged to

“challenge each other to see who can collect the most food”. Leaving unaddressed poverty and social injustice as social problems, maximising donations and quantifying outputs become the ultimate goals and worthwhile activities in themselves. With quantifications working together with the neighbourhood discourse to make CPs into competitive places of success and celebration, the same community discourse is at work here in the activation of potential volunteers as useful and contributing members who “play an active and positive role” where ‘fighting’ hunger becomes an enjoyable pastime activity, stripped of any political ramifications or connection with those affected by poverty. Conversely, refusal or failure to participate implies passivity and immoral reluctance or ignorance to the issue of hunger, leaving no room for alternatives. In presenting NFCs as inclusive events inviting wider community clubs to get ‘engaged’ as the normative expectation of responsible and active members, this obscures the exclusion by those actually affected by hunger and poverty who appear only as implied actors spoken for as worthy recipients in need.

In a very similar way, an appeal in a Tesco (2017) customer magazine released shortly before a Christmas collection outlines the different ways to help and “get involved” through donations to a local food bank, at the CP in store or by volunteering at a food bank. After again emphasising the ease and convenience of participating in the collection, customers are also invited to buy selected products from corporate partners where “each purchase triggers a 5p donation” in a joint effort to “to raise a total of £200,000 for the charity”. In encouraging more active consumption, customers are assured that “There's never been a better time to re-stock your store cupboard and help those in need”. As prime example of ‘cause marketing’ promising wider social benefits while improving corporate image and obscuring economic profits (Fisher, 2017) these practices highlight the usefulness of hunger as marketable opportunity to maximise sales in wider corporate networks. Crucially, money is being ‘raised’ for the charity and not for “people in need” directly, assigning responsibility for their care to professional organisations.

FareShare (2015b, 2016) provides instructions to new volunteers in briefing manuals addressing volunteers as “part of an amazing team” and offering background information on affiliated charities and how their members benefit from food donations. In a series of “top tips” provided for the NFC, readers are instructed what constitutes appropriate conduct at the events and what is expected of them during the day, including what to wear, when to arrive and how to interact with shoppers and staff:

*“As customers enter the store, approach them with a smile and one of your FareShare shopping lists. [...] Tesco staff will provide you with a Neighbourhood Food Collection tabard or a sash, as well as the FareShare Shopping List. [...] Share the collection cheer on the Twitter-sphere! Take photos throughout your shift and share on Twitter with the hash tag #everycanhelps” (FareShare, 2016)*

What may seem like natural and spontaneous displays and interactions by groups of volunteers, including taking and sharing the images analysed above, are in fact learned, sometimes improvised, practices which were once informed by discourse before taking on their seemingly independent function in the dispositive. The manual further provides instructions and key phrases to be used when approaching customers with a smile, asking them to “donate an extra item of food”, to “take part in our Neighbourhood Food Collection” or donate “for people in need today” while handing out leaflets. Documents like these in combination with verbal instructions by senior volunteers therefore set the discursive boundaries for what can be said, done and made visible at the events by enforcing normative expectations and guidance for appropriate conduct. For instance, they construct CPs as places of fun and casual volunteering opportunity which are not intended for political debates or to convince people of charitable solutions, as the FareShare manuals makes clear:

*“Be prepared for some customers to be uninterested or too busy to engage with you. This is perfectly normal for such an event so don’t take it personally – just move on to the next customer.” (FareShare, 2015b)*

*“You are not required to deal with difficult customers. If you feel intimidated by a member of the public or threatened in any way, please remove yourself from the situation by seeking the assistance of the Tesco duty manager or security manager.” (FareShare, 2016)*

Stressing instead the ‘fun’ atmosphere, the manual specifically instructs volunteers not to engage “uninterested” customers as failure to participate in the events is deemed normal for some busy or uninterested shoppers, leaving unaddressed those who might disagree with the charity’s practices. Rendering absent and inappropriate any contestation of its truth claims, the charity manual does not anticipate any debates between volunteers and shoppers about the nature of poverty or anything beyond the collection of food in addressing ‘hunger’. Instead, it makes provisions for volunteers’ personal safety by positioning any “member of the public” challenging or in some way disrupting the joy of the collection as ‘difficult’, intimidating and threatening. As the charity discourse seeks complete dominance in providing the only solution to hunger through active and self-less volunteers dedicated to their ‘neighbourhood’, dissent and alternative problematisations and solutions are countered and suppressed.

As a private place of consumption, the supermarket space is under full control of the Tesco staff including a “security manager” who are all standing by to remove any ‘difficult’ people from the scene, as security and CCTV stations tend to be located near CPs at the store entrance. This discursive and spatial ordering of the situation under the threat of enforcing physical security measures sets limits to possible actions and imposes a distinct power relationship between protected volunteers and entering customers. In doing so, three subject positions are made possible for shoppers, either as helpful citizen-consumers engaging and contributing to the event through private donations, as ‘busy’ shoppers who pass by disinterestedly without repercussion and finally as ‘difficult’ and problematic individuals who are actively disturbing or threatening the joyful event and must be forcibly removed.



### ***Subjectification and self-positioning by volunteers as active speakers***

Finally, this section adds to the identified subject positions by considering the more active roles volunteers take in their own subjectification (Bührmann & Schneider, 2008) by negotiating and putting discourses into practice in the situational context. Drawing on interviews and videos produced by both charities and Tesco, this section considers volunteers not merely as positioned or visible actors interacting with material tools in the production of visibility and constructions of food charity but explores their potential as speaking subjects capable of self-reflection, re-interpretation, positioning of others and possible refusal or partial enactment of available discourses. In giving accounts of their experiences and involvements with the charities, volunteers are themselves active users of discourses and involved in the positioning of others, including donors and recipients. Here, some of the inherent contradictions in dominant charity discourses will become visible, as well as the contested nature of some truth claims.

On their website, FareShare have published an interview with two of their volunteers reflecting on their participation:

#### ***“Heroes don’t always wear capes. Sometimes it’s a tabard***

*Q: With so many Neighbourhood Food Collection under your belt, do you have memories that stand out?*

*Lucy: It's always nice when people you interact with actually take part and go the extra mile. The instances when a group of guys have come in just to grab a couple of beers and end up buying a carrier of food.*

*Woody: Yeah, especially at a store like Kings Cross when people are just rushing in. You quickly give them the leaflet and see them read it and get what it's about, watching them convert and come back with items.”*

*(FareShare, 2017)*

Both Lucy and Woody praise the active engagement by shoppers who reciprocate their friendly approach by going the ‘extra mile’ and donating generously. As outstanding memory, Lucy reconstructs a storyline (Bosancic, 2016) of a successful exchange where shoppers are “actually” responding to the approach and turned from a “group of guys” as selfish consumers solely intent on buying beer into participating donors who answer Lucy’s interpellation by “buying a carrier of food”. The same transformation at the level of subjectivity is reconstructed by Woody where he quickly hands a leaflet to shoppers “rushing” into the store to later watch “them convert and come back with items”. Both volunteers are in a position to ‘convert’ others from consumers to consumer-donors by inducing charitable conduct with help of the material arrangement of the CPs at the store entrance and use of leaflets as carriers of discourse. Leaflets are vital non-human actors tasked with slowing down shoppers to disrupt not only their behavioural routine but also put into practice and normalise the charity discourse as they “see them read it and get what it's about”. In the rest of the interview, Lucy and Woody continue to embrace and praise the convenience and fun offered by the volunteering position:

*“Woody: It's [a] small amount of time, you can just rock up and volunteer, and don't need to go through any training. Because it's just down the road from our offices you can still do stuff afterwards; last time we volunteered and then went out for food.*

*Lucy: Yes, you just turn up and it's really easy, and something different from sitting in an office all day. You aren't asking for money and people feel like they are doing a positive thing by taking part. And anyone could do it.” (FareShare, 2017)*

Requiring little time and no training, anyone can “rock up and volunteer” and simply “turn up” without any long-term commitments and being “just down the road” from both, little effort is needed to fit volunteering into their working day. Moreover, Woody appears to fully embrace the fun and festive character of NFCs where a successful shift can be followed up by going “out for food” together. Neither volunteer makes any reference to social injustice or the nature of

hunger but both emphasise the personal benefits and welcome distraction from their office job brought about by the offered volunteering position. In particular, Woody shows no awareness of how “going out for food” is in sharp contrast to collecting food to feed the needy unable to afford basic items, let alone going out for meals. In return, both potential volunteers and donors get to “feel like they are doing a positive thing by taking part” as promised reward where personal gratification and feeling ‘good’ by taking up the offered position as active community member and contributing to the fun are everything, whereas actual outcomes and social change beyond the collection remain of no concern.

In a series of promotional and documentary videos filmed by both charities and Tesco for their Youtube channels, websites and social media campaigns, volunteers were also interviewed to give accounts of their personal experiences of the events:

*“INT: [NAME], how is it going here today?”*

*[Vol] Well we've had a fantastic day so far, we've probably collected something in the region of 50 crates of food and we're probably on target of collecting about 80 crates today and if we manage to do that for the whole weekend for 3 days then we could be looking at feeding maybe up to 5,000 people which is just brilliant really. So thank you, Tesco!”*

*(Trussell Trust, 2013)*

Providing a ‘fantastic’ experience to the volunteer, the collection is again constructed as enjoyable and successful event. Donated food is quantified as “50 crates of food” as immediately visible and tangible result with an overall, completely arbitrary, target of 80 crates to be collected over the weekend. Crucially, these collection targets are set by the food banks and based on their demands and current stock levels, not the actual needs of people experiencing ‘hunger’. The volunteer then adopts the discourse of ‘feeding’ people before expressing her gratitude to Tesco as vital corporate partner worthy of credit for the success, when in fact Tesco are arguably major beneficiaries through increased sales, promotion of

their own food brand and improved corporate image. Another Trussell Trust volunteer (Tesco, 2012, Nov 30) emphasises their close relationship with Tesco admitting that without Tesco's help their food bank would not even have been established.

Another food bank manager (Trussell Trust, 2016c) was equally full of praise for the 'fantastic' event, describing NFCs as "an amazing time". Again, the collection becomes a measure and expression of the community's generosity made visible in the volume of donations. Without reference to the impact on poverty or wider social change, the 'difference' is not made to recipients' lives directly but "to the stock levels in the food bank". Only by extension are 'clients' addressed as ultimate recipients who can be provided with desperately needed food. Another Trussell Trust volunteer provided a more personal rationale for volunteering:

*"[TT volunteer] I retired early due to ill health and I was looking around for something to get involved in and somebody told me about the foodbank and I was immediately attracted by the simplicity of the concept really: Somebody is hungry, you find some food, you give it to them. Seems to be a sort of basic human response. It makes a difference I think, people leave with a smile on their face which is good all around."*  
(Trussell Trust, 2016c)

As before, the simplicity of volunteering is a major attraction, as he defines the 'concept' of charity as pre-existing "basic human response" without accounting for how he himself is involved in simplifying the problem: It remains unquestioned why "somebody is hungry" and why food charity appears to be the only option available. Likewise, the response where the food bank will "find some food" simplifies the collection process and obscures the power dynamics and possible alternatives to private donations of food. The final step where "you give it to them" leaves out the complex network of referrals and contested ownership of food, to be explored in later sections. Reflecting on his overall experience, the volunteer then locates the 'difference' made in the 'smile' left on clients' faces as they leave the food bank, not in any material change to their position. Such visible displays of gratitude are common normative

expectations of clients and not easily denied (Tarasuk & Eakin, 2003) as the hidden costs in food bank settings (Selke, 2013). In the following chapters, I will return to the significance of producing positive affect in relation to the emotional logic of neoliberalism (Binkley, 2018).

## **Constructing subjects of food charity**

### ***Discursive presence and (in)visibility at collections***

Previous sections have already explored how recipients of food donations, primarily food bank ‘clients’, are constructed as absent “people in need” across displays and material objects around the CPs and positioned by volunteers in talk and by charities and supermarkets in documents. This section will take a more in-depth look at the visible presence and discursive formation of ‘clients’ at NFCs, including the nature of their ‘needs’ and new power relationships emerging from their categorisation by the charities in the same documents and videos. Then, some rare interviews with food bank clients in the promotional videos will highlight the power effects at work in their testimonies as needy recipients in crisis, where their subject position demands visible displays of gratitude to reinforce the charity’s truth claims without permitting alternatives to surface.

Whereas volunteers were seen to be heavily engaged in symbolically charged practices including celebrations and interactions with shoppers and Tesco staff that give visibility to food charity as solution to hunger, recipients or ‘clients’ remain physically absent from all CPs. In their self-positioning through these supporting practices, volunteers were shown to stand in for the absent hungry to collect food on their behalf by formulating their needs on ‘shopping lists’ and universal truth claims on other displays. As trusted proxies and responsible administrators of food donations, this highly visible presence of a professional charity organisation run by dedicated volunteers does not require the physical appearance of ‘clients’. As implicated actors and imagined community members in need, ‘clients’ are only discursively present in the situation and positioned through recurring discourses of crisis and feeding visible on signs and display stands used at the CPs:

*"Help us feed people in need"*

*"Emergency food for local people in crisis"*

*"Feeding local people in crisis"*

Likewise, signs attached to trolleys, tabards and donation buckets make appeals to “Help us feed people in need” and give gratitude on their behalf (“Thank you for helping us feed people in need”). This very limited variation between constructions at CPs across Tesco stores around the country does not distinguish between individual needs or even make any reference to the reasons why these needs remain unmet or what the causes of ‘crisis’ are. Instead, it presents a universal need for food by a homogenous group that does not require further definition, since the urgency of hunger is self-explanatory and easily relatable. The neighbourhood discourse identified before is also at work in constructing recipients as “local people” and close neighbours, as opposed to distant strangers. This localism calls upon shoppers to take up a caring role for other community members, while reassuring them that all donations are destined for ‘local’ people like themselves. Although most CPs also accept monetary donations with the use of collection buckets, there is no explicit appeal for money but a sole focus on ‘feeding’ people by donating selected food items. Stressing the universal need for food, the status of worthy recipients is protected, since demands for money could raise questions about how that money is spent and evoke suspicions of abuse.

The leaflets available at CPs employ the same reference to “local people in crisis” and “people in need” but with added emphasis on the genuineness of need to counter exactly these suspicions and stereotypes of the unworthy poor taking advantage of people’s generosity by adding that “foodbank clients are listened to and signposted to services that can provide further support, helping to break the cycle of poverty” and “all clients are referred to us by frontline professionals”. Here, the ‘signposting’ to different, yet unnamed, services promises a more comprehensive answer to the “cycle of poverty” beyond the food gift to present a holistic solution and counter potential doubts about the efficacy and sustainability of food donations. Emphasising the referral of “all clients” provides further assurance of their genuine claim and

positions the charity as trusted administrator of food who will distribute all donations responsibly in partnership with “frontline professionals” as experts best placed to define and authenticate people’s needs.

Among the three NFCs analysed between 2015 and 2017, there was a considerable shift in the way ‘clients’ were discursively constituted and made visible in the situation. During the Christmas collection in 2015, ‘clients’ were not visually present at all but only referenced on banners and tabards worn by volunteers as “people in need” or “in crisis”. However, with the following collection in June 2016, new display stands produced by the Trussell Trust franchise were used at CPs across stores:

*“EMERGENCY FOOD FOR LOCAL PEOPLE IN CRISIS*

*1 in 5 people live below the poverty line in the UK. People in [PLACE] are going hungry today. We provide 3 days nutritionally balanced emergency food to local people in crisis. All clients are referred to us by frontline care professionals. Every food item is donated by people like you. Can you give food, time or funds to help stop local people going hungry?”*

The text appears next to three images, one showing food items deemed suitable for the collection and the other two showing ‘clients’ receiving food at the food bank. In the first image, a young woman is holding her child who is clasping a can of food given to her. In the other, a young man is given a plastic bag by a volunteer while standing next to another woman, presumably his partner, holding a baby. Both these images make a strong emotional appeal to shoppers by presenting ‘clients’ as responsible parents taking care of and feeding their children. Moreover, ‘clients’ are presented as young families worthy of help where any given donation will reach dependent children who find themselves “below the poverty line” through no fault of their own. Despite the rare reference to poverty, this is again connected to hunger and food provision rather than structural causes or conditions creating poverty. Considerable effort is made to construct food gifts as valued “3 days nutritionally balanced emergency food”

where the “3 days” emphasise the temporary nature of their ‘emergency’ which can be adequately addressed through food charity. The claim to nutritional balance is in contrast to the image of food items showing heavily processed and durable food items in tins and boxes. Yet, their colourful mix and different shapes and sizes of packaging also suggest variety, rather than fresh, healthy and nutritionally dense food. Failure to provide the latter remains obscured by the more fundamental problematisation of hunger as something to be solved by cost-effective feeding of invisible masses. Finally, as with the leaflets, the reference to the charity’s intricate referral regime in partnership with “frontline care professionals” presents ‘clients’ as worthy claimants in genuine need, yet without spelling out who the unworthy are, as their entitlement is solely determined by expert organisations whose medical gaze (Foucault, 1994) is no longer confined to institutional settings, as later chapters will demonstrate.

### ***Making visible the ‘worthy poor’***



Figure 15 Clients' quotes on display



With the Christmas collection in 2017 a range of new displays featuring 'client' testimonies and quotes (see figure 15) were produced by the Trussell Trust and FareShare and placed strategically around the CPs.

*"It makes a massive difference. When I contacted the foodbank I only had rice and beans left in the cupboard" Vicky, Salisbury*

Shoppers are assured that their donations make a "massive difference", since they allow the food bank to feed grateful clients like Vicky. What is left out, however, is the referral process discussed above, since clients do not usually contact the foodbank directly and those who do would be directed to a referral agency for a voucher, which is then to be taken back to the foodbank to prove eligibility. As a worthy and grateful client, Vicky only contacted the foodbank as a last resort in a time of absolute desperation when she had "only rice and beans left in the cupboard", further assuring potential donors that their gifts will reach those in genuine need. The image of plain rice and beans serves to make donors more sympathetic to her plight and supports appeals to donate essential food items promising immediate impact. Other visible client testimonies present a more transformative notion of personal change beyond the provision of basic food:

*"I am indebted to the foodbank for helping me to get back on my feet and change my life." Hugh, Coventry*

Here, the client remains 'indebted' after receiving the food gift and expressing his gratitude to the food bank, and by extension to the generous donors. Gratitude is given not for the food received but for a fundamental, yet undefined, intervention allowing him to "get back on my feet" stressing his active role as a recovering subject finding his way out of individualised poverty. It remains unknown what the original problem in his life was or how exactly the food bank has intervened but there is no doubt about the necessity for him to change his life, attributing credit to the food bank as catalyst to this personal transformation. Further

examples of this sort of emotional debt also featured in my interviews with two Trussell Trust managers speaking about their experience of the NFCs:

*“we have people that will go and do their shopping and come back with a whole trolley full of stuff! And goodness this is really generous, thank you so much and nine times out of ten there's people who have used the foodbank at some point and they'll go you probably won't remember me but I came to foodbank two years ago and I know what it's like you know so that's (.) we often bump into people then that have got real positive experiences and stuff.” (WFB)*

*“we do supermarket collections and a lot of the time while we're doing them we'll have somebody come up and they'll bring us a trolley full of food and they'll say this is my thank you to you because I needed (.) I accessed your food bank and you helped me and now I want to pay back so they'll bring us a trolley full of food.” (LFB)*

Blurring the boundaries between absent clients and former clients who have now regained consumer status, generous donations become opportunities to repay some of the debt owed to the food bank. Constructed by the manager as the typical clients making up 9 out of 10 donors at the events, clients are expected to return the gift they once received and “pay back” through a symbolic act of kindness. At the same time, this allows former clients to fully embrace their new status as rehabilitated consumers, having successfully completed the transformation from hungry client in need to generous donor able to purchase extra items.

Other displays used by the Trussell Trust frequently draw on Christmas as a time for festive giving when “there are lots of mothers who can't afford to feed their children” in a strong emotional appeal to shoppers where it is once again a food bank volunteer speaking on behalf of the absent mothers to make a case for their need. In constructing their typical clients as “mothers who can't afford to feed their children”, they are positioned as the ultimate worthy

poor with a selfless desire to feed their innocent children. Hence, by extension any donation at a CP helps to feed a hungry child in need, yet without making any reference to reasons why mothers remain unable to buy food for their children themselves or indeed ways of changing these circumstances. As the problematisation remains hunger affecting young children, rather than lack of income, the inability to purchase items does not require solving.

In contrast, banners and displays used by FareShare construct a much wider client base, with the charity delivering meals to different groups rather than dealing with individual clients:

*“A freshly cooked meal makes a big difference to the physical well-being and emotional well-being of our clients” Andrew, Community Centre Manager*

*“The food helps people to get on with living their lives. We know if the older people come here they get at least one good meal a day.” Gloria, Community Centre Volunteer*

*“It's so expensive to buy food for the community centre, these donations really help”*

Still operating within the discourse of ‘feeding’ people, these displays provide a contrast between the visibly basic durable items at CPs and the “freshly cooked meal” prepared in community centres. As beneficial to both physical and emotional ‘well-being’, meals serve to feed ‘older people’ who cannot provide for themselves. Here, it is also the community centres who benefit from donation as they do not need to buy essential items themselves.



absent poor, food charity presents itself as most cost-effective solution to hunger where otherwise recipients could not be trusted to spend the same money as wisely or responsibly, tasking instead shoppers with helping to make these moral choices obsolete through an indirect act of feeding.

### ***Referral and medicalisation of poverty***

This section now turns to the rationalities of the referral regime and the partnerships between food banks and expert agencies which promise more long-term solutions in addition to providing donated emergency food. A full-size poster used by the Trussell Trust illustrates the different steps involved in "Supporting people" where the logistical efforts of donating and sorting of food, both supervised by volunteers, are followed by a "wide range of professionals such as doctors, health visitors, social workers and police" identifying "clients in crisis" before issuing a voucher. In Step 4, people redeem their voucher for "three-days' emergency food" and are then signposted "to agencies able to support with longer-term problems". The involvement of 'professionals' allows food banks to defer authority and responsibility to agencies positioned as experts and true authorities on poverty. It is their duty to set the criteria for what constitutes need and then identify it in populations through expert diagnosis, while the criteria for eligibility go unmentioned along with those who are identified as not in genuine need. The "wide range" of medical and social actors and institutions further lends authority as part of a medical discourse where hunger requires expert diagnosis of a treatable symptom of seemingly naturally occurring 'crisis'. Nothing is said about who is turned down without being given a voucher or indeed those people who refuse to approach an agency in the first place but still would be entitled even by their own criteria. With an intricate professional network in place, food donations become vital contributions to a larger solution to hunger endorsed by medical authorities and even the police, making any refusal or critical challenge very difficult.

Clear emphasis on 'further support' in addition to food presents a more comprehensive treatment regime where those identified as in genuine need can redeem a voucher for 'emergency' food as initial treatment. Volunteers effectively act as nurses with an active

listening role before diagnosing and referring people to expert agencies for further treatment, the nature of which remains undefined. By offering a 'warm drink', volunteers position themselves as equally warm people in a welcoming setting, seemingly outside of power since clients' entitlement has already been confirmed before they enter. Their actual power exercised through diagnosis and direction through "signposting" remains obscure as clients' are constructed as patients with "longer-term problems" which remain undefined: Here, hunger is seen solely as temporary symptom requiring "emergency food" before more fundamental treatment can address suggested underlying problems resulting in their individual predicament. Any long-term need for food and adequate material provision hence remains excluded as inappropriate dependence and unworthy of charitable help.

The medicalisation of hunger as treatable aspect of life is also evident in another Trussell Trust display, which along with the previous constructions of "local people in crisis" shows the face of a smiling food bank client along with the quote: "... it's part of a great jigsaw of my recovery". Following the problematisation of hunger and provision of "emergency food" as initial treatment, the food bank service becomes part of her very personal 'recovery'. Without reference to any specific medical condition, the client is shown as actively seeking a way out of poverty by making use of the different services available to her. Making up a "great big jigsaw", she accepts her responsibility to fit the different elements together and show initiative by seeking additional support for her unnamed problems as a condition for receiving food gifts. At the bottom of the display, shoppers are called upon to "get involved today" by three given options of volunteering or donating either food or money.

Where clients are pictured and made to speak in short and highly selective quotes, it is to give accounts of their 'recovery' to reinforce the truth status of charitable help and to show gratitude and emotional debt owed to food banks and their donors as saviours in times of crisis. These normative demands for gratitude, humility and willingness to seek personal reform and transformation by adhering to expert advice leave no room for dissent or anything but uncritical endorsement of food charity, since doing otherwise would jeopardise their

position as worthy and grateful poor entitled to food gifts. This passivity in their constitution as worthy and obedient clients seeking treatment for individual crises is also evident in their physical absence from CPs and inability to voice their needs and make demands of their own. Being present alongside volunteers becomes unthinkable, since direct approaches to shoppers are only deemed appropriate when coming from trusted and selfless volunteers, whereas the same demands for money and food by those directly affected would constitute begging rather than collecting donations.

Here it becomes clear how the dispositive delineates not only the range of the discursive and visible problematisations and solutions to poverty but also creates rigid conditions of possibility (Mayerhauser, 2015) for action and involvement by responsible citizen-consumers as community members. As the invisibility of alternative actions functions as political exclusion, the dispositive exercises power not only in making visible and normalising charity practices but by increasing probabilities for selected actions by consumers. At the same time, divisions are drawn between the visible and the invisible (Renggli, 2015) as the dispositive invites a particular gaze in activated consumer-donors, while excluding and rendering invisible alternative problematisations and images of poverty which would demand social and political action rather than acts of private consumption. In structuring the available fields of action (Clarke et al., 2017) for ‘clients’ as worthy recipients, volunteers were shown to be positioned as trusted proxies and speakers for the absent poor. While volunteers are heavily engaged in all aspects of the NFCs to create a highly visible spectacle, ‘clients’ remain physically absent and only discursively present on its periphery without the ability to shape or interact with the variety of material objects employed and play no part in the discursive construction of ‘shopping lists’, banners or the appeals for charitable action and increased consumption across trolleys and other non-human elements.

### ***Food aid as crisis management***

The following section will explore in more detail how ‘clients’ are positioned and targeted for intervention by the two charities and Tesco in their online campaign and other documents

relating to the NFCs. In a Christmas issue of their customer magazine released shortly before the 2017 collection, Tesco featured a full-page ad dedicated to the events including a client case study, tracing his journey from a failed business venture and family illness to eventually turning to the food bank:

*“Desperate to find a way out of the crisis, Hugh turned to The Trussell Trust food bank in Coventry, where he was given help - not just with food parcels but also with advice on debts, his granddaughter's diet and, later on, a chance to work at the food bank. After losing everything, Hugh credits The Trussell Trust with getting him back on his feet. These days, you'll find Hugh and his big smile at the Coventry food bank, which he manages, helping more than 20,000 people facing crisis and food poverty every year.” (Tesco, 2017)*

Initially, Hugh is presented as family man looking after his ill granddaughter and as former business man who has “lost everything” due to events outside his control, emphasising that he does not intentionally seek out the food bank but only as a last resort out of desperation. As he “quickly fell on hard times, struggling to feed the family and deal with creditors”, he is presented as actively looking for a way out of his crisis by receiving not only food but also taking up “advice on debts” and “his granddaughter's diet”. Rather than develop a material dependency unworthy of charitable aid, he becomes an active subject in his own reform by following expert advice provided by the food bank as institutional authority on health, finance and employment. In return, the food bank claims credit for restoring not only his family's health but also his economic utility in transforming him from a desperate, hungry and uninformed client to a useful, independent and well-integrated food bank manager offering the same service to others. Having successfully reformed himself as active subject, he is rewarded with the “chance to work at the food bank” and put into practice his newly found independency as useful worker. While considerable effort is made to portray the food bank as community centre and caring institution providing comprehensive solutions to poverty,



nothing is said about external and social factors which lead to individual crises in the first place. Likewise, it remains unclear who is funding Hugh's new paid position at the food bank or what its envisioned position is in relation to existing state welfare institutions. Given the overwhelming and life-changing impact in Hugh's life, however, any critical questions and possible alternatives are quickly countered by the implicit assumption that without the food bank, Hugh would again lose his job and people like him would no longer be cared for.

On their websites and videos documenting the events, FareShare present a much wider notion of recipients by promising to "deliver the food you collect to homeless hostels, refuges, older people's lunch clubs, children's breakfast clubs and other charities working with people in need". Yet, here too food provision is linked to a larger treatment regime targeting individual problems, as explained by a FareShare manager:

*"We have an army of volunteers to help us and many of them have backgrounds in homelessness, drugs, alcohol, mental health issues. They come to us when they are moving forward and rebuilding their lives."*  
(Tesco, 2016, Jun 23)

Providing services across different community centres rather than food banks, volunteers are positioned as well trained and equipped to deal with a range of 'clients' given specialist 'backgrounds'. Strikingly, clients are only implicitly constructed as being affected by "homelessness, drugs, alcohol, mental health issues" as highly individualised and medicalised causes of poverty, excluding any social or structural factors outside the individual. Offering a destination for recovery, clients are positioned as actively seeking out support and "moving forward" to overcome poverty by taking responsibility in "rebuilding their lives". As autonomous subjects, clients are provided with support and expert advice but ultimately remain tasked with transforming their own lives. In a similar way, the Trussell Trust (2017b) stress the urgency of need around Christmas time when "increased winter fuel bills, and the pressure of choosing between heating and eating, will sadly push many families into food crisis". Despite the rare reference to external factors driving food poverty, "food crisis" is again

constructed as naturally occurring and inevitable event. In a promotional statement by David McAuley, CEO of the Trussell Trust at the time, he draws a similarly fatalistic picture of poverty as inevitable phenomenon:

*“We want to say a massive thank you to everyone who participated in this summer’s Neighbourhood Food Collection. Unavoidable circumstances such as illness, redundancy or an unexpected bill can all leave people facing hunger and needing help from a foodbank. In communities up and down the country parents are skipping meals to feed their children, which is why the incredible generosity shown by Tesco customers, store staff and volunteers is so valuable; it enables Trussell Trust foodbanks across the UK to be there to provide emergency food and support when anyone is hit by crisis.” (Trussell Trust, 2016a)*

Both medical issues and economic causes are presented as ‘unavoidable’ determinants of poverty outside of individual control. Clients are positioned as community members from across the country and as parents skipping meals to feed their children, a familiar and recurring image used in the construction of worthiness. Again, food banks are the only named institution providing both food and support without possible alternatives. As community and generous food donations are demanded as universal solutions, the CEO constructs a climate of risk and insecurity where ‘anyone’ is a potential food bank client and at risk of entering crisis, further justifying the need for steady donations.

However, quite a different picture is drawn by a Trussell Trust volunteer interviewed for one of the promotional videos:

*“[TT volunteer 2] When people come to the foodbank, they don’t want to be there. So we don’t ask questions as to why they’re there, we don’t need to. They’ve been referred. But some people will open up they will open up*

*and tell you why they're there. And some of the stories are quite heart-breaking.” (Tesco, 2016, Jun 23)*

Unmentioned until now, the food bank becomes a potential place of shame and stigma where people “don’t want to be” contrary to previous emphases on a welcoming atmosphere, warm drinks and friendly volunteers creating a seemingly idyllic place of temporary refuge from the reality of poverty. Since any client entering the food bank has already been referred by an agency, their entitlement does not need further justification which might add to their feelings of shame or discomfort. However, this leaves out the detailed process of referrals where people still need to explain the nature of their crisis to a referral agent before being issued with a voucher. By deferring this judgment call onto the agents, volunteers can effectively distance themselves from the responsibility of deciding over genuineness of clients and instead offer a listening ear to their “heart-breaking” stories. This confessional procedure and the complex power dynamics in which clients are asked to give an account of themselves as worthy subjects of charity will be further explored in the following chapters.

### ***Subjectification and self-positioning by clients***

This next section will draw on some rare instances of ‘clients’ giving active testimony and speaking for themselves in some of the videos. In these highly selective accounts from edited sources, ‘clients’ will be shown to adopt and live out available discourses in accordance with their subject position as worthy and grateful recipients explored above. In addition, however, they also become active in negotiating and testing the boundaries of their position where some of the normative expectations and power dynamics in relation to volunteers will become clearer.

Inside a Trussell Trust food bank, the video begins with short statements by two clients providing a brief rationale for going to the food bank:

*[Client] “I haven't got any money to buy food so [...] it's the only place I can come really”*

*["Mother and Foodbank recipient"] "So I just come to the foodbank and they help me with food, clothes, things like that (..) advice"*  
*(Tesco, 2012, Nov 30)*

The lack of money cited by the client is in sharp contrast to previously analysed statements by the charities and Tesco which solely problematised a lack of food and hunger as temporary problem without reference to income or the ability to *buy* food. Without explicitly stating it, for the client the food bank becomes a substitute as “only place” to come to after having lost the ability to buy food herself with no further account for how this affects her dignity and status as consumer-citizen. The second client is portrayed as “mother” and “recipient” by the food bank in line with previous constructions of parents as worthy recipients. Her statement is crucial for emphasising the wide range of support provided beyond food and her late addition of “advice” signals her willingness to actively participate and take responsibility in overcoming her crisis. In the following segment, a volunteer is seated at a table next to the client and taking notes for the composition of the food parcel:

*["Volunteer"] "What are the things you're in most need of? Nappies, pasta right?" [takes notes]*  
*[Client:] "(..) Yeahh."*  
*(Tesco, 2012, Nov 30)*

Even this brief interaction allows some insight into the complex power dynamics at work between giving volunteers and receiving clients: Firstly, the volunteer is in a position to ask the client to prioritise her needs without making initial demands of her own. Then, before she can respond, the volunteer proceeds to assume her needs as mother for “nappies” and “pasta”, to which the client is only left to agree as the volunteer is noting down *her* choices on a packing list. Remaining without capacity to voice her own needs given the normative expectation of gratitude and worthy and responsible care for her child, the client is left to agree and accept what she is given. The discursive space and positional order of the food bank with its clear separation between volunteers as trusted administrators and safe-keepers residing over food

as private property and clients as grateful and obedient recipients hence allows no room for the client to speak in any way other than to show gratitude and present themselves as genuine claimants. Only once she is no longer seated next to the volunteer, she speaks more openly about her experience:

*[Client] "I knew I could get it but I felt like ashamed to come to these places you know I mean I will probably be coming a few more times but I do want to get back to work."*

*(Tesco, 2012, Nov 30)*

Despite being certain of her entitlement to a food parcel as worthy mother in need, she was left feeling "ashamed" to come to the food bank as a place of social stigma and personal failure. She admits her continued need but crucially follows this up by insisting she wants "to get back to work": Not only does uptake of paid employment offer the only visible way to avoid future stigma and shaming, it is also vital part of her active subjectification as worthy recipient seeking work while avoiding personal dependency. Informed by dominant discourses of welfare entitlement and cultures of dependency at work in the Trussell Trust's referral regime and limits imposed on the number of parcels given in a 6-month period, the client is made to position and discipline herself within these available norms demanded by her subject position. Here, any deviance from these norms and expected conduct is likely to be sanctioned by loss of entitlement to future parcels or simply the exclusion of their testimony in the videos. Indeed, further short statements by clients are purposefully used in the endorsement of food banks as vital community institutions without alternative:

*[FB client] Basically I'd be struggling without the foodbank, I wouldn't know where to go, where to turn. So this is a good idea that they bring this and hopefully they spread the word out that more people knows [sic] about it.*

*[Other client] And maybe I one day can drop some stuff in for them and*

*donate it! [smiles]*

*(Tesco, 2012, Nov 30)*

Without ever speaking about the quality or quantity of food received, or how the food parcel satisfies their long-term needs, both clients accept and endorse the food bank in the absence of a viable alternative. The second client goes even further in signalling her intent to repay the emotional and material debt owed (discussed above) by working actively to regain consumer status and donate to the food bank “one day” herself, fully embracing her position as client enrolled in self-reform focused solely on the future without accounting for how this change is to take place.

In the following video, another young mother gives an account of her gradual experience of food poverty as an emerging symptom of poverty:

*[Client] “I never thought in my wildest dreams that I would have to come to a foodbank. In March 2013 I was coming to the end of my maternity leave and I’ve been told I was entitled to claim for benefits so I applied and it took much longer than I was expecting. To start with, I was still going shopping and just buying less and less, the cupboard was kind of getting more and more bare and then I think just one day I sort of looked and I was gonna get breakfast and I thought uhh perhaps I won’t have breakfast this morning then. [...] And then one day my Home-Start coordinator phoned up just to see how I was getting on and she said so what have you got any food in? And I just sort of thought well I don’t really know, do you want me to send the Trussell Trust around? And actually she persuaded me that I did really need it.” (Tesco, 2017, Nov 21)*

Her experience of food poverty is quite different from the notions of sudden emergencies and unexpected crises evident across volunteers’ accounts and documents explored previously. Following the benefit delay she describes a much more gradual decline in her consumer

capacity: “Buying less and less” over time instead points to financial difficulty and a possible combination of insufficient or unstable income, rising prices and benefit delay which are all economic factors addressable and ultimately changeable in sharp contrast to the construction of “unavoidable” life events cited by the Trussell Trust CEO above. The absence of a sudden and unforeseen crisis then makes her account more relatable using familiar imagery and cultural symbols (Link, 1997) of the food cupboard to other people who may equally experience a decline in buying power as first symptom or onset of poverty. Again, food poverty is constituted through a medical discourse in which symptoms appear seemingly without structural cause and require attention and expert treatment before they escalate into full-blown crisis with possible homelessness and destitution as fatal outcomes. First unable to recognise the symptoms herself, the client relies on advice and diagnosis by her Home-Start coordinator who is in a position to send for Trussell Trust volunteers as trusted diagnosticians able to prescribe a remedy through emergency food after confirming the genuine nature of her crisis. The client makes visible efforts to position herself as someone who requires persuasion prior to accepting charity to retain her status as worthy recipient. Reflecting on her experience at the end of the video, she is left to demonstrate her gratitude to the food bank:

*“That year when we had a food parcel at Christmas, just really, it really made our Christmas to be honest because it just meant that I could have a proper Christmas dinner, my daughter’s first Christmas was taken care of and it just really took the weight off my mind.” (Tesco, 2017, Nov 21)*

Crediting the food bank with providing Christmas dinner for herself and her young daughter, her temporary crisis has been resolved through short-term relief and symbolically taking the ‘weight off’ her without addressing any of the causes that have affected her declining buying power in the first place. In the absence of any wider change, viewers are assured that the food bank will be there when the next seemingly inevitable crisis hits.

## **Conducting consumer conduct in the spectacle of food charity**

Across the analysed images, mundane material objects such as trolleys, collection boxes and buckets were shown to carry instructional discourses designed to maximise visibility and interrupt autonomous shopping behaviour to induce a different kind of charitable conduct. Non-human objects were shown to perform a series of functions as main carriers of discourse with a vital role in carrying and imposing knowledge of food charity across the store and activating shoppers as consumer-donors. Participation and inclusion in the community of givers are therefore tied to economic conditions including buying power where the discursive ordering of the situation creates the normative conditions of possibility for conducting oneself in public places of consumption.

As seen with the frequent references to Christmas, cheerful giving further offers an antidote to consumption as moral release valve for “survivor guilt for the affluent” (Poppendieck, 1998, p. 198) where symbolic donations absolve from responsibilities and induce political docility. Poppendieck’s (1998) critical account of food charity in the US overlooks such emotional rewards to donors and the normalisation of conduct in a double-sense (Mayerhauser, 2006): Even those consumers who remain inside the discursive space of normality and outside of poverty are disciplined and reminded to be at constant risk of losing their consumer status, their very normality, and falling into poverty. This is where donations are offered as only way to position the self within the margins of normality of consumption evidenced by people’s ability to buy extra items. As a defensive distancing mechanism, donations allow the spectre of poverty and the hungry Other to be kept distant and separate from the self. This is further reinforced through the instant emotional gratification of helping the neighbourhood and receiving visible expressions of gratitude from volunteers in return. Separation, therefore, is both an effect and a condition for the spectacle (Debord, 2005, p. 10) as “the visual reflection of the ruling economic order”, manifesting separation between producers and consumers of food, as well as between donors and recipients of charity. The physical absence of ‘clients’ at CPs in addition to any graphic images of the realities of lived poverty, including living



conditions, enforce this separation from the poor and are necessary for maintaining a functioning consumer space. Donors, therefore, are united in their charitable contribution and in a community of givers but remain isolated and detached from recipients of their food gifts.

As poverty itself is privatised as matter of charitable concern and opportunity for building community spirit and expressing philanthropic care, poverty relief becomes a marketable commodity readily packaged with an assignable value to be displayed alongside other products at the shop entrance. Coupled with the universal truth claims of solving hunger in the community, imposing a highly visible market in a new 'economy of poverty' (Selke, 2017) effectively counters and attacks the credibility of more distant, hence less effective 'bureaucratic' and failing welfare systems based on social redistribution and entitlements rather than free exchange and gift giving. Creating a festive atmosphere with colourful decorations and joyful engagement by volunteers, the dispositive produces politically docile consumer bodies in a spectacle void of social context where visible consumption in a functioning and highly professional market becomes the solution to invisible poverty caused by apparent failures of state welfare. In its place, 'neighbourhood' and charity are presented as only viable solutions, requiring different techniques of governing the poor through expert knowledge and activation of responsible 'clients' seeking recovery from poverty as temporary medical condition befalling individuals, not as social or political problem.

This is where Marxist critiques of neoliberalism (Hall, 2011; Harvey, 2007) point to processes of commodification and the imposition of market principles in all areas of social life leading to an alienation from politics and the privatisation of poverty. Neoliberal transformation works through the conversion of "political character, meaning, and operation of democracy's constituent elements into economic ones" (Brown, 2015, p. 17) mainly through marketisation: Once governed as a political problem through transfer of welfare benefits from a state authority, poverty becomes an object for the invention of new markets to be filled with cheap own-brand products designed for feeding immediate needs. Different private businesses, charities and advice agencies can then tailor their services to meet the demands of new,

otherwise hard-to-reach substitute-consumers (Selke, 2013) where moral values are accumuleable assets and symbolic displays of generosity and giving time are another form of currency. This process of marketisation was clearly visible in the quantification of food donations celebrated at CPs and across the online reporting where a sole focus on numbers on the supply side and ignoring actual needs are characteristic of neoliberal rationality making even concepts like community into a measurable output and promoting comparison and competition between stores, regions, charities or participating volunteers.

As Andy Fisher (2017) has shown in his exposure of the Hunger Industrial Complex in the US, charitable expansion brings with it new opportunities for businesses to maximise profits through strategic use of cause marketing and PR campaigns. Corporate partnerships and advertising campaigns between the UK food charities and big businesses add to the symbolic benefits and improved corporate image where a symbolic amount of money is donated to the charities for each product sold in so-called brand partnerships with companies like Coca-Cola (FareShare, 2018). Charity thus becomes commodified as a liveable experience (Livingstone, 2013) offering ‘fun’ experiences to be consumed in exchange for donated time or food. By buying designated extra food items such as pre-packed ‘family’ bags, shoppers already fulfil their ‘anti-consumerist’ duty by buying their way into charitable, and hence ethical, consumption. This cultural form of capitalism (Zizek, 2009) is clearly visible across the different ‘brand partnerships’ and creative marketing campaigns, which included a Christmas offer where for every turkey sold, Tesco donated £1 to FareShare and the Trussell Trust. In the spectacle of food charity, “commodification is not only visible, we no longer see anything else; the world we see is the world of the commodity” (Debord, 2005, p. 21) as consumption itself becomes cause for celebration, wholly detached from chains of production, invested labour or material needs of those excluded from places of consumption. Livingstone (2013, p. 351) here points to the ‘interpassivity’ of social relations where charitable giving is a displacement of struggle which maintains consumption and reproduces capitalist forms as we “consume the mediated form of cultural spectacle presented to us”.

However, both Marxist analyses of consumerist spectacles and normative critiques of corporate food charity maintain a sole focus on economic benefits and the implementation of market principles, thus ignoring the consequences for the constitution of neoliberal subjects and novel modes of governing conduct through technologies in commodified spaces (McDonald, Bridger, Wearing, & Ponting, 2017). My analysis has shown that NFCs are not merely “dismantling the social and economising the human” (Selke, 2013, p. 240) in a moral economy of poverty but are heavily reliant on a collectivising neighbourhood discourse harnessing social resources and appealing to community activism as opposed to rational actors interested only in individual consumption. Despite the neoliberal move to diversify and privatise provision and maximise political docility in shoppers, volunteers and clients, it is then not the absence or removal of politics from social life or indeed the mere depoliticisation of poverty at work but a new form of ‘ethopolitics’ (Pathak, 2014; Rose, 2001b) providing guidance for the self-formation of subjects. Conducting individual practices of consumption, volunteering and overcoming poverty in consumer spaces treats individuals no longer as political citizens and isolated actors but as members of an imagined community which “appears as a kind of natural, extra-political zone of human relations” (Rose, 2001a, p. 4) promising freedom from state intervention and a return to lost values of care and moral bonds.

The neighbourhood discourse combined with the diagnosis of ‘crisis’ in the subjectification of volunteers and clients aims for exactly this activation of ethical self-formation by promising various rewards and offering orientation for how to conduct themselves as valued, and most importantly ‘normal’, members of that community. NFCs create a new “habitat of subjectification” (Rose, 2001a, p. 8) in ethical spaces which suggests an active choice of identity but imposes self-understandings based on limited problematisations of hunger and treatable individual crisis. As de Vos (2012, p. 93) suggests in relation to similar humanitarian aid campaigns, “subjectivity seems to be the end-goal and not only the means to make people donate” here. Food charity has been shown to work through appeals to emotion, promising absolution from political responsibility and positive feelings as useful contributors defending

their own normality as consumers. The result is a limitless reproduction of positive affect of 'doing good' and rebuilding functioning neighbourhoods, as both donors and supermarkets profit from the maximisation of generated outputs. Visible quantifications of donations and celebrations of meeting targets and setting new records also reinforce these emotions and offer assurance that targets are being met and outputs increased, regardless of actual needs.

The offered volunteering position therefore allows self-invention and management as active subject (Dean, 1995) and community architect actively solving hunger as a lifestyle to be practiced promising a range of rewards and improved standing and respect in the community. Moral communities then form new displaced and fragmented fields (Rose, 2001a), rather than a withdrawal of government where politics of problems is the politics of conduct requiring ethical self-formation of new subjects united in their role of 'solving' hunger but separated from those without consumer status. For recovering 'clients', a return to the normality of consumption becomes the only visible path and requires active work on the self under the moral guidance of experts. The next chapter will explore further how failures by recipients to engage in self-management by performing visible worthiness and willingness to reform under expert supervision carry disciplinary penalties of exclusion as unworthy community members no longer entitled to charitable help.

### ***Failures in disposition and possible resistance***

This final section briefly discusses the potential for resisting the normalisation of charity by demonstrating the contingency of its truth claims and the active roles of subjects in putting available knowledge into practice. In one of my own interviews with a Trussell Trust project manager she began to praise the partnership with Tesco in expected ways but then proceeded to reflect much more critically on the effects of the food bank's presence at the supermarket:

*L: I think (.) it's a bit of a double-edged sword in some ways because (.)  
it's really great that we have such a great presence at Tesco and it's really  
great that we do Neighbourhood collections twice a year and they're so*

*supportive of what we do (.) but on the flipside of that I think it really normalises foodbank and that potentially can become quite dangerous in some ways. [...] I kind of don't want it to happen but I don't know what the alternative is. It's really hard isn't it, I think.” (Manager, WFB)*

Clearly conflicted between their “great presence” and the obvious benefits to their food bank on the one side and the danger of normalisation on the other, the collections suddenly become a “double-edged sword”: She openly negotiates the demands of her position as food bank manager with a more critical awareness of how their presence “normalises foodbank” as a response to a social problem. Rather than providing the universal solution to the problem of hunger, she critically reflects on the ‘danger’ but then struggles to formulate an alternative, returning to food charity as only possible option at the time. Later in the interview, the manager even continued to raise concerns about possible benefits to the supermarkets through their local partnership with Morrisons who would ‘dump’ surplus food, including fresh produce, at the food bank regardless of demand or storage capacity to avoid paying landfill tax. Rather than a fully formed subject of food charity, she at least temporarily becomes a “subject of doubt” able to “reflect upon the dominant discourse, its interpellations and the subject positions it offers” (Clarke, Newman, & Westmarland, 2007, p. 141), thereby actively contemplating the interpretive schemes (Keller, 2018) made available in the dispositive.

In her auto-ethnographic account of participating in a NFC as volunteer, Garthwaite (2016a) observed that many of the shoppers either ignored the CP to rush past her without donating or quickly dropped off the items without engaging in conversation. My own experience of participating as a donor (Moeller, 2019) had highlighted further limitations and unexpected moral dilemmas where, despite following the provided leaflets, I still found myself in an uncomfortable position having to choose either the cheapest own-brand products or more expensive ‘treats’ for absent recipients. These examples demonstrate the possible disparity between discursive templates as static subject positions offered by organisations and institutions on one hand and the active processes of *actual* subjectification (Keller, 2013) on

the other. Through the latter, subjects may only partially live out and adopt disposed practices and understandings of the self (Bosancic, 2016; Bührmann & Schneider, 2016) in the situational context and in unintended or unanticipated ways.

Therefore, dispositives are not deterministic apparatuses or all-powerful “machines which make one see and speak” (Deleuze, 1992, p. 160) in straight-forward ways. Despite the complex interplay of human and non-human actors at CPs, and their discursive and non-discursive efforts to ‘sell’ food charity as a solution, shoppers are only guided in a narrowing game of possibilities without guaranteed outcomes. The food charity dispositive shapes material and discursive conditions for possible actions through normalisation which makes visible and presents charity as natural and expected conduct. It is not a disciplinary apparatus which forcefully coerces subjects, but it creates new governmental spaces to maximise probabilities and offer orientation for some actions (e.g. donating) as individual care for the self. Crucially, its visualising strategies can only create possibilities for interaction and distribute political relevancies (Mayerhauser, 2015) without certainty of success. As Rose and Miller (2010, p. 288) put it, “we do not live in a governed world so much as a world traversed by the ‘will to govern’” where failures to induce desired conduct and produce useful subjects continually reveal contingencies as potentials for subversion. Dispositive analysis tries to exploit these gaps and contradictions through “the need to locate, for each apparatus, lines of breakage and fracture” (Deleuze, 1992, p. 167) in their knowledge production. The key challenge here was in recognising the productive roles seemingly trivial collection practices and material objects play in supporting discourses and carrying knowledge to bring about an effect of strangeness on present solutions.

## **Conclusion**

In this in-depth analysis of NFCs, one of the most surprising findings has been the absence of any visualisation of poverty, its causes and those directly affected in their living conditions in contrast to highly visible celebrations of generous neighbourhoods expressing their care for

'local' people. Upon closer look, however, recipients were discursively present but kept at a safe distance from places of consumption in stories of salvation and personal recovery. Across these narratives, food banks and partner organisations positioned themselves as only available option and expert authorities under whose guidance individual crisis could be overcome and community be restored. A medical discourse was recurrent throughout the data set, problematising food poverty as diagnosable and treatable condition requiring expert intervention, rather than political or social change. In their own testimonies, 'clients' took up offered positions of recovering patients seeking reintegration into the community by seeking paid work and avoiding dependency on charity, thus protecting their status as worthy recipients. Through these processes of subjectification, people become grateful clients of charity at the cost of being fixed in their identity as recovering victims reliant on charitable help. Without expressing their needs and wishes, or any anger or resentment, they are held captive in an affective position of emotional debt and desire to overcome reliance on the kindness of others. Whereas existing research remains focused on shame and stigma as negative experiences, my analysis has emphasised the productive formation of neoliberal subjects who are responsible for their own recovery, maximising their positive emotions and expected to be economically useful, integrated and obedient to expert authority. Volunteers, meanwhile, are given an active role in collecting and feeding as expressions of neighbourly care at the centre of a spectacle in which social problems are made into marketable opportunities and experiences to be consumed. With considerable economic and symbolic benefits to businesses, food charities were also shown to benefit in material ways with Tesco 'topping up' all food donations at a rate of £1.68/KG, which according to financial reports amounts to over £1m of the Trussell Trust's (2017a) annual revenue. Guided by these findings, the following chapters will explore how food and money collected at NFCs are put to use in food bank settings to fund various interventions in close collaboration with expert agencies and businesses.

A mixed corpus of images, videos, documents and interviews has allowed reconstructing these dominant discourses informing collection practices, along with the knowledge invested in visible materialisations at the collections. Despite analysing large amounts of data and systematic exploration of variation through situational analysis, there are limitations to the chosen approach. Without collecting primary data from ‘clients’ (see chapter 3), I did not explore any potential divergence from the offered positions through actual subjectification as I did with volunteers’ accounts. I do not claim, therefore, that *all* recipients willingly undergo the documented process of referral and personal transformation as grateful clients indebted to the food bank, especially since many of the included sources were purposefully produced and edited by the food charities. However, there is a danger here in linking a sense of partial or diverging subjectification again to ‘actual’ experience in a realist attempt to contrast lived realities with discursive realities<sup>4</sup>. As argued in chapter 3, materialist discourse theory resists this false dichotomy while my analysis has traced strategic responses to food poverty across attempts to guide conduct, induce particular relations to the self and impose arbitrary limits on reality. By prioritising a visual corpus over interviews, I further focused on these normalising strategies and functions of visibility in producing consumer-donors and absent clients where failures and unintended consequences open up opportunities for resisting the governmentalisation of poverty.

My analysis has tried to reconstruct these taken-for-granted practices as strange outcomes of normalising processes in hopes to slow down the normalising machine of the dispositive and “make harder those acts which are now too easy” (Foucault, 2002c, p. 456) by encouraging critical reflection and refusal to conduct oneself in expected ways. Rather than an outright rejection of charity on normative grounds as ineffective or unpolitical, this ‘bewilderment’ as work of critique (Foucault, 2014a) is directed not at the charities or volunteers but at the power-knowledge regimes, and their material infrastructures, which obscure their power effects while creating new social divisions and imposing individualities as generous donors,

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<sup>4</sup> See also the recent turn to ethnographic methods in governmentality studies by writers like McKee (2009) and Brady (2014), as well as Dean’s (2015) strong rebuttal of these realist critiques.



kind volunteers and grateful 'clients'. Through such collective efforts, NFCs may then be exposed as a strategic response to austerity materialised in a spectacle of consumption which promises empowerment and ending hunger in new imagined communities as local spaces for commodified poverty management.

## **5 Discipline and feed: Food poverty, pastoral power and the limits of charity**

Whereas the previous chapter offered a critical analysis of the discursive, non-discursive and material ways food poverty is made visible at Neighbourhood Food Collections, this chapter focuses on the institutional practices of food banks and their local partner organisations. It directly addresses two of the research questions, that is how food poverty is being problematised in food charities' everyday practices (2) and how 'clients' and volunteers are discursively positioned but also actively involved in their own subjectification across different services (3). By focusing in on food bank spaces as situations of enquiry (Clarke et al., 2017) attention is shifted to the local micro-practices of power and ways of subjectification to avoid any recourse to totalising discourses and universal master categories often drawn upon in governmentality studies (Bevir, 2018; Brady, 2016) in favour of a more grounded analysis open to contradiction and new, possibly surprising findings. Taking into account the complexity and 'messiness' of these social worlds (Clarke & Keller, 2014) then avoids simplifications in favour of working out the complex power dynamics and often contradictory ways food poverty is problematised by authorities as they mobilise interventions at the individual and collective level.

As shown in chapter 2, the existing research remains concerned with exploring the experiential dimensions of food poverty or making it into a measurable aspect of life, effectively reifying the concept and placing its origins outside of contestation. To challenge these limited concerns with cause and effect, firstly the different problematisations of poverty, understood as ways of framing a social problem in need of intervention and hence rendering it governable (Triantafillou, 2012), will be explored in interview accounts of food bank managers and volunteers. In contrast to documentary data and archival methods, this approach appreciates the non-linear and often 'messy' ways political questions are negotiated by multiple actors in a situational setting. Rather than providing a critical reading of the language used by these authorities, the analysis is directly concerned with the material and technical dimensions of

these problematisations (Dean, 1996) and how they are negotiated and inscribed in local practices in efforts to 'solve' food poverty. All three food banks with their regional differences and variation in practices are then considered sites of action and situations where discourses become materialised and put into practice by actors capable of interpretation and a degree of self-positioning, the extent of which I consider an empirical question rather than a theoretical one. After a critical summary of three distinct problematisations at work, I will turn to practical issues of emergency food provision, personal interactions and emerging power relationships between volunteers and 'clients'. This pastoral care will be shown to include disciplinary mechanisms intended to avoid dependencies and create active 'clients' finding their way out of poverty with support from various advice agencies. Despite the enforcement of conditionality and discipline, emergency food aid remains limited as necessary first step in a therapeutic regime, followed by more behavioural interventions.

## **Local problematisations of food poverty**

With considerable variation in the ways food poverty was being problematised across the food banks in this study, there were three dominant constructions of the causes of poverty and reasons for food bank use which at times interlinked and often contradicted one another. The aims of this discourse analysis are not to establish a representative sample of all available constructions of food poverty or exhaust textual variation but to critically explore how food poverty is problematised in situational contexts by active speakers (Keller, 2012) with material power effects. It also aims to demonstrate the unstable, fluid and contradictory nature of the phenomenon of 'food poverty' as an outcome of discursive struggles for interpretation or *Deutungskämpfe* (Jäger & Jäger, 2007) which determine the range of possible understandings and demand different responses and solutions while giving rise to new subjectivities as ways of experiencing the self. By reconstructing these dominant problematisations and their roles in guiding established practices, I will demonstrate that seemingly unpolitical poverty relief is informed by historic discourses of the worthy poor and the need for discipline.

### ***Problematisation 1: Food poverty as sudden crisis driven by structural factors***

In stark contrast to the visualised constructions of hunger explored in the previous chapter which avoided references to structural causes of poverty, in the interviews food bank managers and volunteers frequently referred to low incomes, stagnant wages and rising living costs when asked about the causes of food poverty and increased food bank use in their area. However, none of the participants specifically attributed blame for the “cuts that are coming in” (Manager, WFB) but would instead contrast today’s hardships arising from the inevitability of austerity with better times where a senior volunteer at SFB would have “never envisaged that I could be out of work” and “could always earn enough to keep myself going, that's not necessarily true now”. Reluctant to point out direct responsibility for these developments, she instead drew on a global climate of risk and insecurity as powerful forces outside of control:

*V: “The government can help but it's a worldwide problem it's one government can't solve it I think. Even in my lifetime umm my children are well educated, they both got degrees and masters, higher qualifications but they found it difficult to get their first job. Both of them.”*

Rather than attributing blame to the government for imposing welfare cuts and not providing a similarly stable economic environment she experienced in her life, food poverty is constructed as small part of a much larger “worldwide problem” which escapes any precise definition and hence remains a natural force which can only be alleviated in its local effects. Two of the managers also pointed to instances where the benefit system had not been the initial cause but rather failed to offer material support when the client’s partner had left in times of need and instead referred people to the food bank:

*“and they're not on benefits but something has gone wrong suddenly then yeah, they need to be able to find out quickly. [...] Because yeah the other*

*day I had a (.) I think she had actually gone to the jobcentre because umm her husband had suddenly left with the car and and I think he managed to move all their money out or whatever so she was left with nothing and fortunately the jobcentre sent her here.”*

Here, food poverty was constructed as sudden and unexpected crisis without a single identifiable cause where the food bank remained as only possible destination in times of crisis without any critical reflection on the job centre’s failure to offer the needed help and support. These constructions centred around a larger discourse of risk and insecurity where managers presented food poverty as omnipresent danger which can affect anyone regardless of circumstances:

*“like I says everybody is at least two steps away from losing everything you and you’ve got look at it that way it’s not (.) anybody can lose everything and you it’s just one of them things it happens to us you know one day you’re alright the next minute you’ve lost your job and when you’ve lost your job (.) you you know how do you pay your rent, how do you pay (.) your bills and all the rest of it and then sooner or later you spiral out of control.” (Manager, LFB)*

Constructed this way, food poverty becomes an effect or “just one of them things” that happen naturally as direct consequence of losing one’s job and financial control. The suddenness with which it appears from one day to another further reinforces this sense of insecurity where “everybody” is constantly at risk of having to turn to a food bank as last resort. Participants also referred to rising housing and transport costs and a lack of social housing where one manager pointed out the imbalance where “you’ve got very low paid economy but equally lots of people with a lot of money” in more affluent areas where “half the battle [...] for me as a project manager is convincing people that there is a need for a foodbank” in the first place. So despite the constantly lurking danger of falling into food poverty, two of the managers

problematised a lack of awareness among local residents and saw it as their role to raise awareness of food poverty as a hidden phenomenon.

Managers and volunteers at all three sites further emphasised the material impacts of the switch to universal credit including delays in payments of up to 56 days, sanctions and suddenly cancelled claims by the job centre. The identified problems centred around technical issues of benefit reform and universal credit in particular, including a reliance on online applications and other barriers to access. Delays in payments and extended waiting periods were also problematised by the managers along with caps on tax credits where two managers stressed the difference from unemployed jobseekers to counter stereotypes of the idle poor taking advantage of free food:

*“I think the only thing I do get really frustrated about is that I have to constantly have to explain to people that people that access the food bank are not people that just (.) sort of on the backside and do nothing you know [...] and people are stereotypical of what people are like that come into food banks you know I'm not saying that maybe some of the clients aren't like that there may be you know but at the end of the day I'm not here to judge you know I'm here to help people and so are all my volunteers we're here to help people in a crisis” (Manager, LFB)*

The manager made great efforts to position herself, and by extension ‘her’ volunteers, as non-judgmental and actively challenging unjust stereotypes where crises are consequences of systemic failings rather than individual faults. By offering seemingly unconditional help the manager positions the food bank as the only possible alternative to a failing welfare system. Yet, she qualifies her challenge to existing stereotypes of the idle poor who are “on the backside and do nothing” by acknowledging that “maybe some of the clients” *are* like that, but even in those cases she does not want to be regarded as judgmental and deciding over individual entitlements. Volunteers found themselves negotiating these implicit assumptions about

‘typical’ food bank clients by acknowledging that these may be true in some cases but ultimately refused to make that determination themselves:

*“people don't overspend people are underfunded. I'm sure some people do overspend but that's not for our to judge on it but I think people can just be a bit more tolerant” (Volunteer, SFB)*

Similarly, a volunteer at SFB admitted that there were clients who “maybe use the system but that happens in all (..) rich, poor, middle, whatever and people don't use the food bank unless they need it. And you know, they are not getting caviar and things like that”. After self-correcting her earlier description of clients “fiddling” with the system, she positioned them as very much rational-choice actors taking advantage of any help as “an innate thing” not exclusive to the poor. Using the symbol of caviar as luxury item, she contrasts the basic items provided by the food bank to further counter potential suspicion directed at clients whose possible moral failings are instead to be ‘tolerated’, not so much as an act of solidarity but an expression of kindness and neighbourly care for the poor much more in line with the dominant discourses explored in the previous chapter. She actively negotiates the image of the typical welfare scrounger (Romano, 2017) by blurring the boundary between the worthy and unworthy poor without imposing a strict separation, instead demanding that overspending be more tolerated in contrast to later distinctions and normative expectations of financial prudence and self-reform. Consequently, the volunteer gets to present herself as non-judgmental and tolerant role model making a difference through kind and unconditional help in the community.

In sharp contrast to the exclusive problematisations of individual hunger across NFCs explored in chapter 4, this problematisation does address structural causes said be underlying hunger and causing crises. Yet, while austerity discourses often acknowledge the broader economic context and structural drivers of crises (Gill & Orgad, 2018), they do so in ways which accept precarity as inevitable consequence brought about by a naturally precarious world of risk factors outside of control. As parts of a chaotic external world outside that is no

longer accessible (Chandler, 2016a), such economic determinants and structural systems are no longer changeable beyond technical adjustments. Consequently, this problematisation reinforces the need to turn attention to an inner world where individual human capacities and resources are still modifiable and vulnerable psyches can be moulded into more shock-resistant ones. This is where problematisation 1 interlinks with the familiar medical discourse found in chapter 4 to prepare rationales for psychological intervention arising from the need to adapt to growing insecurities and reduce individual risks of falling into poverty. Without posing any fundamental challenge to austerity policies and the creation of crises, the targeting of isolated, sudden and individual crises will later be shown to reinforce the need for self-discipline, instil responsible behaviour in spending and positive attitudes towards self-development in creating resilient crisis-proof subjects (Gill & Orgad, 2018).

Meanwhile, the highlighting of technical problems around welfare delivery and universal credit matches the reform agenda advocated by the Trussell Trust and corresponding research (see chapter 2) which I have argued presents a useful form of discursive capital which ignores structural inequalities and power relationships. Technical problematisations and a seemingly progressive reform agenda are instrumental in protecting the charity's legitimacy and offer ways to rebuke accusations of short-sighted food aid and further institutionalisation. In the interviews, this was in fact the dominant problematisation when staff were asked directly about the causes and nature of food poverty, but throughout the interviews, particularly when discussing clients' lives and reasons for food bank use, staff pointed to very different causes of food poverty to rationalise the need for disciplinary and behavioural interventions.

### ***Problematisation 2: Food poverty as personal chaos and culture of poverty***

Contrary to the outlined attempts to absolve clients from individual responsibility and defend them against stereotypical accusations of welfare abuse in light of inescapable, uncontrollable and deterministic factors, there were competing and often contradicting constructions of food poverty as symptom of highly individualised crises and psychological deficiencies. Rather than



structural causes outside of one's control, these problematise a lack of rational decision-making, chaotic lives and personal histories of long-term dependencies as underlying causes. Contradicting not only some of her own earlier accounts but also those of her volunteers, the manager at SFB did not accept low incomes as main cause but instead problematised a lack of resilience and a complex interplay of personal factors in clients' lives:

*“there's yeah family breakup, ill health umm can cause err quite a lot of trouble I think, you know it's not so much that they maybe they don't have enough money to buy the food but it can be their situation has just become too chaotic or they're suddenly in this moment of crisis that maybe the main breadwinner is ill and the partner doesn't quite now you know they and they're not able to do the caring and the shopping and the everything else so it may be just one food parcel helps them just to kind of settle down and get on, regroup if you like.” (Manager, SFB)*

Rather than caused by low income or economic circumstances, the client's “situation” itself becomes problematic and “too chaotic” to cope with the loss of income during common life events such as illness or family separation. The personal crisis is thus separated from their income situation, as clients are suddenly unable to perform care duties and routine tasks including food shopping. In contrast to the earlier powerlessness and inevitability of poverty as part of a global crisis, when problematised in this way food poverty is suddenly rendered manageable and susceptible to intervention: The chaos and personal inability to cope in a “moment of crisis” then demands outside help where a food parcel offers temporary relief and allows clients to “settle down and regroup” and restore order to their chaotic lives. The manager went on to elaborate on her diagnosis of chaotic lives when she visited some of the clients' homes to deliver food parcels:

*“you know people are living very very simply or I mean some of them are leading very chaotic lives and houses are very dirty and you know I kind of think uhh you would be great just to go there with some buckets and*

*some cleanings! [laughs] You know just go and help them just to make their lives a bit I don't know.” (Manager, SFB)*

What starts out as a description of ‘simple’ living conditions, which may be attributed to economic hardships, quickly shifts the light upon clients “leading very chaotic lives” as something they have chosen for themselves. Her observation of “very dirty” houses reinforces the sense of chaos, disorder and lack of discipline in their personal lives, followed by her own disciplinary drive not only to help clean up their homes and chaotic living situation but to transform their very mentality to instil discipline and orderliness. This concern with cleanliness also appeared in a different form at LFB where the manager explained the need to extend the provision of emergency food to hygiene products:

*“and each parcel would put some soap in them, toothbrush you know so at least they've got something because it's alright having a client come through the door wanting food but if you can't have a shave or you can't get washed to go for a job interview or anything like that, what's the point of giving them food? [chuckles]” (Manager, LFB)*

While all three food banks provided these additional items alongside ‘emergency food’ with reference to their high prices and essential status, here the manager goes beyond that rationality by, albeit in a slightly sarcastic fashion, questioning the logic of “giving them food” while they remain incapable of making themselves presentable to attend job interviews and gain financial independence. Again, what is problematised here is a lack of employability and inability to perform as an orderly, clean and economically useful citizen where food bank managers take up a pastoral role (Dean, 1995, p. 575) over the unemployed, tasked with constantly “assessing the needs of clients, helping them prepare a plan to return to work and directing them towards the activities that enhance their job-readiness” which reduces poverty to the level of the individual. Evidently, different problematisations demand different interventions as the food parcel is deemed ineffective at restoring physical appearance and making clients presentable for job interviews. Placing the emphasis on restoring employability

and facilitating a return to the job market as only conceivable way out of poverty contradicts her earlier accounts when she had already problematised economic conditions and low pay as structural conditions where anyone regardless of employment status could fall into poverty.

At WFB, the same problematisation of chaotic lives was at work, yet focusing more on a small group of clients exhibiting problematic conduct in their resistance to offered interventions combined with an abusive element where the referral regime designed to avoid dependency was being intentionally circumvented:

*“how do you deal with people who are constantly in and out of services is the other thing, so they might come 3 times in 6 months and not technically go over their allowance but we're seeing them every 6 months. So because their lives are chaotic and they might be okay for a while and then the slightest little thing happens and then they're back into our doors again and then we don't see them for a year and then they're back in again. I suppose you're always gonna have that sector of society to a certain degree” (Manager, WFB)*

The main problem for the manager here was how to ‘deal’ with problematic clients, who despite best intentions and attempts by the food bank, were still “constantly in and out of services” in contrast to the sudden and unforeseen but temporary crises which can be directly addressed through ‘emergency’ food provision. They remain unable to escape food poverty “because their lives are chaotic” where any intervention by the food bank is short-lived due to a lack of personal resilience and “the slightest little thing happens” to throw them back into a state of crisis, in contrast to the majority of non-chaotic clients able to cope with sudden shocks and unexpected life events. As a rationality for intervention, this recurring discourse of resilience originated in environmental disaster management (Davoudi, 2018, pp. 157–159) and demands not only a return to economic performance as normality but also targets the individual’s capacity to “change, adapt and respond to stress” where failure to display such “bounce-back-ability” then warrants labelling as ‘chaotic’ client resistant to change.

Problematisation 2 specifically targets these unworthy clients who, despite offered guidance, fail to conduct themselves in the orderly manner required for an escape from poverty. Yet, in line with her pastoral position the manager above does not explicitly deny further entitlement within the 3-in-6 rule designed to avoid exactly these dependencies but accepts that “that sector of society” will always remain problematic and more resistant to transformative intervention. More individualised problematisations in relation to universal credit were raised by the manager at LFB who pointed to a lack of rational decision-making and financial capability in clients:

*“the money but they give you all in one big lump sum so a bit like a student loan every three months you get this massive lump sum of money and it's like oh yeah I've got lots of money what do I oh I've got to spend it all so rather than pay your rent or pay the money back that you've borrowed off of people to live for 56 days [...] You're gonna blow it (..) then it's well I've got to pay so and so back I've got to pay me gas and electric so I won't pay me rent this time and then by the time you've finished you've got that far behind with your rent at some point your landlord says nah enough is enough. And you end up homeless.”*

With the introduction of universal credit, housing benefits are no longer paid to landlords directly but instead paid out directly to the claimant as “lump sum” to be managed. She compares this to a “student loan” where clients would inevitably “blow it” and “spend it all” and pay for living expenses rather than pay back personal loans. There is a double-problematisation at work here in the way that the systemic failings of universal credit are also linked to normative expectations of financial prudence and responsibility where those who fail to pay back their debts and rent will eventually “end up homeless”. Once more, food poverty is linked to a person’s inability to cope with crises in resilient, active and financially responsible ways.

Much like the behavioural mechanisms in the formal welfare system (Friedli & Stearn, 2015), problematisation 2 equally targets psychological deficits and wrong attitudes or decision-making to demand self-corrective adaptation through capacity building and positive thinking while requiring the poor to actively seek out support without ever developing dependency. Such moralistic concerns with the lifestyles and choices of the poor have a long history in both UK welfare policies (Levitas, 2005; Lister, 2004) and charitable provision (Dean, 1991; Romano, 2017), with both basing entitlement and worthiness on the poor's moral conduct and work ethic. These concerns can also be understood within a neoliberal turn to behavioural factors (Chandler, 2016a, 2016b; Gill & Orgad, 2018) which problematises lacking cognitive capacity for processing information to build necessary resilience to overcome crises. Vulnerability becomes located in the observed lack of rational decision-making and 'chaotic' lives, with the poor deemed incapable of managing their own risks and taking responsibility for their wellbeing. Chandler (2016b) further points to a common neoliberal strategy in social policy of interpellating subjects as vulnerable and themselves as 'root causes' of problems to rationalise resilience-building interventions before prescribing external assistance in correcting cognitive deficiencies, which I will explore in chapter 6 in the context of signposting and non-food services.

### ***Problematisation 3: Food poverty as result of a failing society***

A third way of problematising food poverty was evident at two of the food banks which touches upon and sometimes overlaps with the previous two constructions. Here food poverty was problematised as the outcome of an individualistic culture, social isolation and lack of community care and cohesion. Located in a rural area of North Yorkshire, the manager and volunteers at SFB emphasised the impact of social isolation by contrasting the welcoming and caring support the food bank provided:

*“you welcome them and you're supporting them you know you're not just handing them a bag of food you know you're trying to make sure they are getting enough support for they are talking to the right people and*

*sometimes they're just happy to know that somebody somebody is caring [laughs] about them because I think that's where I guess it can happen in cities too but people living in very rural areas they can get very mmmm removed from everybody else, they do feel a bit remote and distanced from everybody.” (Manager, SFB)*

Problematising exactly this ‘removal’ from social life, physical and geographical distance is translated into human remoteness and isolation as key dimensions of living in food poverty. In response, the manager takes up a shepherding role (Waring & Latif, 2017) concerned with the wellbeing and moral guidance of her clients through pastoral power as “a form of collectivizing and individualizing power concerned with the ‘flock’ as a whole” (Rose, 2007, p. 73) which promises a return to safety and a caring community as salvation in this life rather than the next. This pastoral function by food bank staff and partner agencies in ‘shepherding’ clients towards salvation through regulation of moral conduct, ‘signposting’ to different services and the promotion of community and self-discipline will reappear throughout the chapter.

A moral decay and lost sense of community was also problematised by the manager at WFB who began by outlining her own experience working as aid worker in South America where poverty was ever-present and visible but had radically different qualities compared to her hometown in the UK:

*“Whereas here it's very hidden and I think that's the thing that concerns me the most, is the actual divide between the lowest paid and the highest paid whatever and that misunderstanding of those sectors of society umm and how destroyant that this, umm (.) yeah whereas there seemed to be a lot more unity I guess in some of the countries that I've been to and I don't know if that's a cultural thing or quite an individualist culture so we're very much like I look after my own and that is my business and we don't*

*kind of want to impose on anyone else and we can't let anyone see that we're struggling"*

In highlighting a hidden poverty and material divide, she was the only participant who made any explicit reference to social inequality and even attributed it a destructive influence, while contrasting the “unity” and sense of community in developing countries as a key cultural difference. The problematisation of an individualistic culture and lack of family ties in times of crises is connected to a communitarian discourse of shared responsibility combined with a nostalgic and much more conservative return to church-based care for the local poor, very similar to the neighbourhood discourse explored in chapter 4:

*“community isn't necessarily found in your street anymore and church does fill that gap for a lot of people, they find community there even if they're not necessarily looking for faith or religion or whatever but what they find is a readymade community that they can feel part of and people are really hungry for that, they want to matter to somebody and they want to be part of something bigger than just themselves” (Manager, WFB)*

This communitarian discourse constitutes food poverty not merely as a material lack of food or income but as a spiritual void causing human isolation where people “are really hungry” for a sense of community and belonging to a larger family. She further linked this imagined community of caring givers to a return to ‘traditional’ family structures where her volunteers would “remember back when you would know your neighbours and generally speaking mums would stay at home and look after their children, so you would speak to neighbours over the fence”. The food bank’s function then lies in filling that ‘gap’ and providing ‘readymade’ moral bonds and Christian care for the poor. Clients are therefore not only in material crisis but suffering from a lack of community and sense of belonging. Otherwise rarely mentioned in the interviews, religious ideology then plays a key function in offering moral orientation and reintegrating the stray poor back into functioning communities.

There are clear parallels here to a ‘broken society’ discourse (Wallace, 2016), first articulated in the “Breakdown Britain” report by the conservative Social Justice Policy Group (2006) chaired by Iain Duncan Smith, key architect of universal credit, and then taken up in several speeches by David Cameron following the London riots in 2011 (Bulley & Sokhi-Bulley, 2013). Said to cause social and family breakdown, the ‘broken society’ is commonly blamed for symptoms of welfare dependency and increasing poverty, along with drug misuse and rising crime. Since then, and with the ‘Big Society’ discourse and the construction of ‘troubled families’ in particular (Crossley, 2018), family itself has become a major target of conservative problematisations of moral decay and failing societies, as well as a physical site of intervention in recent government policy (Lehtonen, 2018; McCarthy, Gilles, & Hooper, 2018) problematising ‘worklessness’, chronic welfare dependency and lack of personal responsibility in a culture of poverty passed on within family structures. The Big Society discourse (Romano, 2017, p. 50) presents a solution in its “invitation to rediscover a (quite romanticised) communitarian past, with the fundamental role of intermediate institutions of solidarity (such as family and local neighbourhood) at the centre”. The romanticised version of an imagined past of communal care is clearly visible in the manager’s insistence on providing a lost sense of belonging, with the food banks becoming exactly such an ‘intermediate’ institution as a substitute family offering an escape from the broken society. Indeed, the Christian church is often described as a metaphor for family<sup>5</sup> and model for integration of the poor, where the manager at WFB offers an antidote to an external world of consumption and an individualistic culture which she blamed for a lack of joint responses to poverty, compared to South American countries where the church continues to have a major influence over communal life.

The key point here is that problematisations of lost values and community attribute food banks and their volunteers a socially conservative – yet productive – function and, as described by managers elsewhere in Lambie-Mumford’s (2013) study, present new opportunities for the church to expand its reach to reintegrate and re-moralise the poor regardless of economic

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<sup>5</sup> See Kandiah (2018) for a Christian argument for family “as a generative metaphor for church” and “an antidote to more individualistic, sadly even consumptive models of church”.



conditions and causes of poverty. Once more, food poverty becomes naturalised and only manageable in its effects of isolation and loss of purpose and belonging. In chapter 6, this problematisation will prove vital in informing food bank services in newly created social spaces offering a sense of Christian community and temporary sanctuary from the world of poverty.

### ***Local constructions of food poverty as a social problem***

Firstly however, the significance of these three broad types of often contradictory problematisations must be reiterated. As shown, problematisations of structural drivers outside of individual control open up space for material solutions where food parcels assist in economic recovery and sustain clients' bodies in times of a failing welfare system, whereas competing constructions of individual crises are grounded in problematic conduct and skills deficits hindering recovery which require and enable radically different types of intervention at the psychological level. One may have expected managers and volunteers to take up one clear position in relation to causes and definition of food poverty, whereas their accounts were shown to shift between problematisations throughout the interviews. Although variation in the social construction of contested social problems has been one of the early themes and key contributions in discourse analysis (Potter & Wetherell, 1987), these overlaps and partial contradictions are not random effects of discursive efforts. Rather, they point to differences in available discourses on poverty which in turn inform a complex range of possible interventions and ways of thinking about poverty. For staff, food poverty was rendered thinkable through available knowledge including 'common sense' assumptions about the poor and historic problematisations of deviance, individual deficits *alongside* competing concerns with social structures as determining factors. By drawing on these available interpretations within their social and cultural context, actors did not problematise a universal and coherent phenomenon which could be measured, but were actively involved in its constitution, demonstrating the discursive struggles taking place over its meaning.

Drawing on Clarke and Cochrane's (1998) classifications of how poverty in the UK has been constructed as a social problem, Romano (2017) distinguishes between 'functionalist' attitudes constructing poverty as natural and even beneficial to competition, 'culturalistic' attitudes concerned with deviant behaviour as cause, 'social' interpretations citing economic and political causes and 'fatalistic' attitudes seeing poverty as unfortunate but inevitable. Whereas Romano (2017) understands these differences as opposing attitudes to poverty in times of 'scroungerphobia' and then uses survey data to analyse their change over time, my analysis has categorised these dominant problematisations not as individual attitudes but as productive, at times conflicting and overlapping social constructions of food poverty. The point here was not to identify fixed attitudes among food bank staff but to explore how available discourses of poverty as culturally available stocks of knowledge (Jäger & Maier, 2016) are taken up, negotiated and put into practice within the situation. Yet, there are clear overlaps between these classifications and the dominant problematisations of food poverty: Both problematisations 1 and 3 are 'functionalist' and 'social' in the ways they naturalise the inevitability of social conditions outside of clients' control. Problematisation 2 was much more 'culturalistic' by comparison in highlighting 'chaotic' lifestyles and moral failings leading to dependency. Whereas Clarke and Cochrane (1998) present these classifications as fixed and exclusive, discourse analysis has shown them to be much more fluid discourse fragments as resources for interpretations of poverty. They guide constructions of the poor as distinctly 'other' group marked by deviant conduct and non-conformity to moral norms of orderliness, personal independence and economic productivity – but also as victims of structural determinants and social change beyond their control. This double-problematisation will later prove crucial in rationalising the diverse intervention strategies inside food banks, targeting both short-term material needs (resulting from external crises) and more behavioural advice services targeting internal skills deficits and attitudes.

The three problematisations have direct implications for available subject positions, as they assign norms and responsibilities in positioning 'clients': Whereas problematisation 1 absolves

clients from responsibility in light of larger structural causes, problematisation 2 imposes a set of moral expectations for worthy conduct, while problematisation 3 seeks to reintegrate stray clients into the community within a socially conservative agenda of rebuilding Christian communities. Problematisations therefore bind together knowledge and power as they set the questions and formulate truths for how food poverty can be defined as a social problem. Here I am explicitly arguing that the tracing of problematisations across food bank practices and discursive (self-)positionings does not serve to determine the *real* cause of food poverty or to contest for example whether or not clients are *really* living chaotic lives: By employing a Foucauldian surface reading of truth claims (Dreyfus & Rabinow, 1983; Triantafyllou, 2012) I am not looking for hidden meanings or obscured realities but solely interested in the links between knowledge and power, that is how the discursive (re)production of food poverty as a phenomenon by and through actors in institutional roles of authority imposes arbitrary limits (Simons, 1995) on what counts as real and what can be done as they demand the necessary truthful interventions to address and solve the problem. Therefore, the remaining chapter addresses how this situated knowledge (Haraway, 1988) of food poverty is inscribed and materialised in the everyday practices of food banks and partner agencies, how these are in turn mobilising solutions through a combination of material and behavioural interventions and finally, how these then bring about power effects by producing self-reforming ‘clients’ as subjects of food charity.

## **Solving food poverty through emergency food aid**

This section provides an overview of the organisational structures and logistical operations across the three food banks before exploring how the dominant problematisations identified above inform material interventions as only initial treatment of food poverty with consequences for the formation of client subjectivity. Particular attention will be paid to the relational dynamics of the food exchange between volunteers and voiceless but grateful clients by adopting a strictly relational understanding of power “that allows one individual to conduct the conduct of another or to determine the conduct of another” (Foucault, 2014b, p. 240) in a

“management of possibilities” (Foucault, 2002e, p. 341). Here, Foucault’s (2009c, 2009d) work on pastoral power will be used throughout as a ‘sensitising’ concept (Clarke et al., 2017) to guide analysis without imposing pre-existing categories or reifying objects through analysis. This situational analysis explores the complexities of power relationships at work at an independent and two franchised food banks and links these to wider practices of governmentality “as the set of relations of power and techniques that allow these power relations to be exercised” (Foucault, 2014b, p. 240) while accounting for regional and organisational differences.

For Foucault (2002e), pastoral power is above all an individualising form of power based on ancient Christian practices with pastors guiding their local ‘flock’ through a combination of institutionalised religious practices, hearing confessions and guidance towards salvation. While this form of the Christian pastorate may have largely disappeared, Foucault (2002e, 2009c) remains adamant that its function has since spread and multiplied across social institutions in the formation of the modern state where there can be no understanding of contemporary governmentality without studying the history of individualising strategies and tactics of pastoral power. An analysis sensitive to pastoral power then shifts focus from a hidden yet seemingly all-powerful discursive power of governmental rationalities onto relational, embodied and “empirically visible agency” (Martin & Waring, 2018, 7-8) of situated actors and their concrete practices in the constitution of subjectivity including “how discourses translate into subjectivity, action and material consequence”. This approach therefore counters any readings of Foucault’s conception of power as totalising and inescapable by emphasising the active role of subjects in translating discourses into identities and behaviour through specific practices which may be at odds or undermine dominant rationalities and subjectification can take many forms. The following sections will therefore explore the roles of food bank volunteers, managers and partner agencies as ‘pastors’ who are both members and leaders of communities and acting as “conduits of governmentality” (Waring & Martin, 2018, p. 141) translating discourses into situated solutions to food poverty.

### ***Franchised vs. independent food charity***

I begin with an overview of the three food banks in this study, their material and organisational structure, local networks and key differences between the two franchised and the independent food bank. Smallville Food Bank (SFB) is an independent food bank located in a small market town in North Yorkshire set up and run in close collaboration with the Baptist church, although managers and volunteers stressed the food bank's independent status from both the church and the Trussell Trust franchise. Across the existing literature, independent food banks have received little attention but there is now a growing awareness of the complexity and diversity of charitable food provision and lack of research into food charity in rural areas (Williams et al., 2016). SFB was set up in 2014 with the support of almost £20,000 in funding by the district council with the specific aim of expanding its food provision to outlying villages. After an initial trial of installing distribution boxes for food parcels was unsuccessful, SFB set up partnerships with a "busy hub of support agencies" (Manager, SFB) including housing agencies, social services, Citizens Advice and other support groups. This has resulted in a logistical and organisational structure that is fundamentally different from the typical food bank model under the Trussell franchise: Rather than giving food parcels to clients directly, these are almost exclusively delivered through referral agents to clients' homes or 'frontline organisations' with the food bank being used primarily for storage and packing of food parcels.

In contrast, Laketown Food Bank (LFB) and Westmarch Food Bank (WFB) are located in urban city areas presenting different challenges and opportunities to the food banks. While LFB oversees a dozen distribution centres with over 200 volunteers from a central warehouse in a business district, WFB is based in a church and community centre from where four other centres are coordinated across the city. Although both are registered as independent charities, they are organised under the 'umbrella' of the Trussell Trust to gain a range of benefits not available to independent food banks including funding opportunities, corporate support and donations. Improved 'access' to companies had led LFB to develop an intricate network with local businesses and large companies, banks and energy companies who would send

volunteers and regularly donate items. In sharp contrast, SFB was mainly supplied through donations at local churches and harvest festivals in schools. Based in a much more affluent city, WFB could rely on a steady base of regular private donors and were “not often in supermarkets on a weekend asking for food and things like that” (Manager, WFB) as opposed to financial pressures at LFB where “everything we do we have to do we have to fundraise for ourselves to keep our costs you know to pay for the rent and overheads and things like that” (Manager, LFB). In addition, the manager at WFB particularly valued the practical benefits provided through the Trussell Trust including IT infrastructure, websites and offered ‘branding’ which otherwise “would cost a fortune”. Another key characteristic of the franchised food banks was the wide use of a complex information processing system used by the TT to generate national and regional statistics:

*“We got their support and it also means that we’re feeding into regional and national statistics and I think umm for us it was really important that we were part of a bigger voice.” (Manager, WFB)*

In addition to the valued expertise, where start-up food banks are given a detailed manual, training and all the TT branded online and media resources, having access to the statistics became a way for managers to be “part of a bigger voice” (WFB) and “lobby the government with that cause [...] the government say there’s no need to access food banks” (LFB) without being openly political. In fact, the manager at LFB strongly rejected any political position by referring back to policies set by the Trussell Trust which demand an ‘unpolitical’ role:

*“I: [laughs] Or maybe where do you see the balance between what the government has to do or can do and what you can address through your work?”*

*M: Oh that’s very political! (.) Ahh I’m not allowed to be political*

*Interviewer: But it’s a political subject isn’t it?*

*M: I know (.) but I'm not supposed to be political [...] I do find that difficult cause I can get a bit sometimes I can get a bit on me soapbox and I do find it a bit hard not to get political about it."*

This exchange shows how managers and volunteers are themselves placed in an apolitical position through institutional discourse where the prescribed practices in the Trussell Trust handbook do not 'allow' a political stance. Even those in pastoral positions of authority are therefore governed by dominant rationalities (Waring, Latif, Boyd, Barber, & Elliott, 2016) and constituted as subjects of power, not as mere conduits for these discourses. The recording of referral reasons and quantifications, however, was widely accepted and even valued to produce a necessary counter-narrative to what were said to be misleading media narratives and government denial about the demands for emergency food. In contrast, the manager at SFB reported having regular political discussions among volunteers and despite not attributing blame, she argued "the government can do more".

With these regional and organisational characteristics in mind, the following section explores the practices and dominant rationalities at work in the composition of food parcels and interaction with clients with important implications for emerging power relationships.

### ***Parcel composition and food choices***

Given its rural location and delivery of food parcels through local agencies, at SFB direct interaction with clients was severely limited and mainly mediated through the packing of the food parcels. Yet even here categorisations of worthy clients and pastoral efforts to care for their client flock can be found, as the manager and volunteers reported frequently holding back fresh food items for families:

*"I try and keep back some fresh food so that I know if a family comes, I can give them a whole a big bag you know a bag of fresh food as well."*  
(Manager, SFB)

*“Yeah we generally it's given to quite a lot of families again so I think last year it was at least 60 children who were in one way or another receiving a Christmas hamper umm and uh I think that's really good because I think some of these people they wouldn't be having much extra for Christmas and it's not a huge amount we're giving them but umm hopefully it'll make a difference yeah.” (Volunteer, SFB)*

By holding back food items or adding additional items to parcels, all volunteers were in a position to care for distant families and even providing Christmas items for children as worthy recipients without ever directly interacting with them. The emphasis on festive giving and enabling a family Christmas was also a recurring theme in the earlier analysis of Neighbourhood Food Collections and here the volunteer likewise appreciated the very limited material impact made by the hampers as “not a huge amount we're giving them” and the “difference” to the clients remains largely symbolic. As with SFB visiting client homes to deliver parcels, the Christmas hampers also prove vital for establishing personal relationships between CAP and their clients whose grateful testimonies are used in a series of videos produced by CAP:

*“The hamper actually made a difference because it made me feel like I wasn't alone anymore. And that people were out there and they were thinking about myself and the children and that we have enough and the support just from lovely generous people that are willing to help and give when times are hard and Christmas can be a really lonely lonely time, so just something as simple as that can change it, it makes such a difference to people's lives, it really does. You didn't just change my story, you saved my life and you changed my children's lives.” (CAP, n.d.)*

This combination of visible gratitude and surprise over receiving ‘luxury’ items including children’s toys before Christmas was evident across several client testimonies in the analysed videos. In the above extract, the food parcel becomes a material mediator of the pastoral care



given by “lovely generous people that are willing to help” which not only addresses short-term and sudden crises (problematisation 1) but also acts in response to decaying community care and lack of local support (problematisation 3). Beyond the material and symbolic provision, its main impact was in the way “it made me feel like I wasn't alone anymore” during a “lonely lonely time” with CAP – and by extension SFB as provider of the hamper – being attributed live-saving powers.

SFB was the only of the three food banks giving out fresh food including fruit and vegetables, but supply varied heavily depending on what supermarkets would donate as surplus food:

*“V: We have some basic lists yes to some extent it does depend on what's donated but the basics are always there rice and milk and cereals and some meat some fish. A good selection of basic things.” (Volunteer, SFB)*

While this suggests availability of a healthy range and variety of food, all “good selection” is made by the food bank staff on behalf of clients who remain absent and voiceless, or as one volunteer put it: “Most people don't want to be reliant on it because it's not a choice when you get a bag of food, it's it's what's given to you” (Volunteer, SFB). However, this lack of choice was not problematised by other interviewees and the manager at LFB explained that the ‘generous’ provision by the Trussell Trust would allow clients to “walk away with a week's worth of shopping that will last them three days you know they can walk away with five six bags of shopping” and “people that are savvy you know can make it last” even longer than that. With the selection and quantity of food items already pre-determined by volunteers, in times of shortages it was also the volunteers who would buy additional items:

*“B: Yeah if we if we're running out of things I think it goes on the website that we need x, y, z. But I think well there is money so if we're short of things we go out and buy them.” (Volunteer, SFB)*

In cases of special dietary requirements at WFB, the manager had instructed her volunteers that “if you don't have anything in that's suitable, then just go and buy it and give me the

receipt because it happens so rarely so we've had a coeliac here before and somebody's run over to Morrisons and got them some gluten free stuff". So even in these exceptional cases of shortages and specific health needs, volunteers would act as proxy-shoppers and make buying choices on clients' behalf. As with the supermarket collections, there was an unspoken but implied dominant assumption that clients could not be trusted with money directly and had to be cared for. The manager at SFB was the only one who verbalised these assumptions in relation to the logistical efforts of providing food over money:

*M: "like some people say oh why don't you give people money because you know you're having to manage all this food and indeed we do have problems because volunteers umm can't lift all the food and we we have a big problem lifting trays of food you have to be careful people's backs and things like that, most of us have all [chuckles] suffered at some point from carrying too much [...] umm but then of course you have the problems of giving people money, you know will they spend it on the right thing is that the fear." [Manager, SFB]*

This implicit 'fear' of clients being unable to spend any donated money on the 'right' things is still part of problematisation 2 and demonstrates how the dominant concern with irrational or immoral decision-making translates into pastoral care given by volunteers. For Foucault (2009c, p. 170) a key principle for the Christian pastorate is "sacrificial reversal" as the willingness of the pastor to make physical and spiritual sacrifices in preparation to give his life to defend and save his flock. In a "reversal of values" the pastor must accept the dangers of paying for the sins of his flock and suffer the related temptations in their place to save their souls, as he is himself saved only when he accepts dying for his flock. By sacrificing their time and risking their physical health, volunteers take on the necessary 'suffering' for their flock of clients to transform their own morality on the path to salvation for which food is essential. Combined with the Christian ethos and powerful imagery of feeding the hungry, giving money

instead becomes an irresponsible option as it would separate pastors from their flock and expose clients to the temptation of bad choices.

The ‘shopping’ at food banks was further said to be accompanied by stigma and embarrassment where clients would go to different distribution centres in other parts of the city or even send a proxy to pick up a parcel for them:

*“there's lots of people and what you find is as well people will go to a food bank out of their area [...] In case they bump into their neighbour or they see somebody or somebody sees them coming in and out of the food bank, so you'll normally find they'll travel (.) or they'll get somebody to bring 'em or they'll get a case worker to come for them rather for them physically to come themselves because they're too embarrassed to come”*  
(Manager, LFB)

Similarly, the manager at WFB also found “that people would, more often than not, go to the one [food bank] that's furthest away”. Paradoxically, by choosing to send a proxy to avoid embarrassment, clients would then give up any personal food choices. At best, however, these choices were limited to substituting items from the standard packing list provided by the Trussell Trust to “accommodate” vegetarians by “swapping” cans of fish or meat for an extra can of vegetables. When challenged on the composition of food parcels and regard for dietary requirements, both managers at LFB and WFB referred back to Trussell Trust policies:

*“M: it is set out on how the Trussell Trust do it and what they say is what's in a parcel umm is being designed umm by (.) by a nutritionist and a chef to say you know they've got enough of each whatever they're gonna get, sugar protein and carbohydrates and things within what's being picked for them but like you say somebody can't have certain stuff it's really difficult.”*

*“L: that's put together by a nutritionist at headoffice which makes it as nutritionally balanced as it can be and you know all that kind of stuff as a little individual charity we would never be able to do all of that.”*

Despite acknowledging the difficulty if “somebody can’t have certain stuff”, this referral to expert knowledge allowed both speakers to defer responsibility to authority figures in the ‘nutritionist’ and ‘chef’. The concern for nutritional balance and adequate macronutrient intake further allows both to position themselves as responsible providers, although neither used the word ‘healthy’ to describe food parcels. As shown with the displays of donated items at the collections points in chapter 4, it is predominantly the mix of different items and quantity that are being used to suggest adequacy and ‘balance’. This referral to expert knowledge and the endorsement by a nutritionist is reinforced by a recent report commissioned by the Trussell Trust (Hughes & Prayogo, 2018) acknowledging but also excusing nutritional deficiency in food parcels where any concerns “are outweighed by the negative physical and psychological impacts of lacking food and being nutrient and calorie deficient”. The dominant construction of feeding people ‘emergency food’ therefore manages expectations where *any* food is supposed to be better than no food at all, once again ignoring possible alternatives beyond charitable solutions.

Finally, it was the discursive environment at the food bank itself with its divisions between receiving clients and giving volunteers that shaped the scope for possible negotiation over parcel composition. Herself identifying as a gluten-free vegan and showing herself as openly sympathetic to how “giving somebody a food parcel strips away a lot of independence”, the manager at WFB first claimed that “any dietary requirement isn't really a problem” since special items could be bought by volunteers. However, I continued to challenge her on this issue:

*“I: But do you think that people are maybe a bit reluctant to declare their requirements or to be selective? Because that could be an issue, couldn't it?”*

*L: Yeah (exhales) yeah it's hard isn't it, you can only really go on what people say umm I know when I speak to clients before someone goes and puts their parcels together, I always try to say to them is there anything you're allergic to or anything [...] I'm quite happy for people to say well I'd normally buy Weetabix rather than cornflakes or whatever and I'm like great if we can deal with it, if we've got them in of course we will for you [...] so I think if you kind of open up that permission for people to choose what they want to a certain degree then I would hope that also opens up the door for them to say actually I'm not allowed to eat this or whatever.” [Manager, WFB]*

Reliant on “what people say” to her, the manager defers back responsibility for food choices to the clients who are expected to communicate their preferences without regard for how the spatial arrangements and divisions at the food bank shape what becomes sayable in the situation with clients depending on the goodwill of volunteers. Even small choices between items are subject to availability of donated items and buying extra items was only considered in rare occasions and solely for health-related intolerances. Here the spatial division combined with normative expectations of visible gratitude is a key driver for the emerging power relationship: While clients are seated and questioned by one volunteer, another “goes and puts their parcel together” as another expression of pastoral care. This division further limits the potential for clients to have any say in the selection of food, with the manager at LFB complaining of some clients who only voiced discontent while going through the finished parcel which annoyed her volunteers. Indeed, the manager at WFB acknowledged that not all volunteers shared her openness for enabling food substitutions:

*“L: you know you would get volunteers that are like well oh they can't be that in need if they're being fussy about what brand of whatever they're given and stuff” (Manager, WFB)*

Genuine need is therefore tied to expectations of gratitude and passive receivership of *any* food as seen in chapter 4, whereas active choice requires buying power as citizen-consumer. Here too, the emphasis is on feeding the needy who must constantly perform their worthiness as grateful recipients. These power dynamics create a distinct discursive climate where criticism and ‘fussiness’ about type, quality or variety of food cannot be spoken and any negotiation must be approved at the discretion of volunteers who are in a position to “open up that permission”. Yet even in the above extract, the manager qualified this choice to “a certain degree” and solely refers to what people were allowed to eat, not what they wished to eat.

### ***Food charity as pastoral care in rural areas***

Although the manager and her volunteers at SFB would at times deliver food parcels to clients in outlying villages themselves, the vast majority of parcels are being delivered through Christians Against Poverty (CAP), a national debt counselling charity, as volunteer B. explains:

*B: “we don't see many [clients], unless they're CAP clients we don't really see clients, we see agencies it's agencies who collect the bags from us. They would say, ring L. or email L. or whatever. And say can we have 3 family and two single for instance. And if, whoever is around on that day will take them to wherever it is but they but we very seldom see what you would call the client who receives the food. But we do if they're CAP clients because the CAP centre is here.” [Volunteer, SFB]*

While some of their volunteers had absolutely no contact with clients and only came to the food bank to assist with logistical work, Volunteer B. would on occasion take the food directly to clients and despite emphasising that these were rare exceptions, she elaborated on the nature of relationships she developed with some clients:

*“B: I was taking food to this person, I won't go into the details of their situation but [laughs] every time I went back he was given me a little plant and something to say thank you and as much as you want to say*

*look that's not the purpose it's I think I've got to respect his dignity of wanting to give something back. I used to pass it on to a CAP client and obviously [exhales] I mean the plant wasn't as much but (..) I kept saying to him look it's not my food it's food that you (.) you know you have a right to it don't but he wants to do it so to make [exhales]*

*Interviewer: So you couldn't really say no could you*

*B: No I would have been, it wouldn't have been I didn't feel comfortable taking it but then I felt that less comfortable saying I can't take it although I always did make sure L. would know I'd done it because otherwise you do have to be careful as a volunteer [laughs] that you're not getting into a different kind of situation [...] that was slightly different but it was it was appropriate.”*

Delivering food parcels to clients' homes created a situation with room for more familiar personal interaction and a mutual exchange of gifts. This desire and “dignity of wanting to give something back” constructs clients as recipients who are themselves generous and able to demonstrate their worthiness not just through humble and passive gratitude but by visible appreciation and actively repaying what they perceive to be debts. Yet, B. distances herself from the position of the recipient from where advantage could be taken and emphasises the “uncomfortable” position she was put in to restore her credibility by pointing out that she always let the manager know about any received gifts. In rejecting instead the temporal and negotiable position of gift recipient, what is missing here is a realisation of how the client is in this ‘uncomfortable’ position much more permanently where his ‘dignity’ would not have to be defended had he not had to rely on receiving food gifts in the first place. A further contradiction appears when B. distances herself from ownership of the food parcel by saying “it's not my food it's food that you [...] you have a right to it”: Firstly, this ‘right’ is very conditional and must first be established by CAP whose practices as referral agent will be explored further below. Then, later in the interview she positioned herself as responsible volunteer entrusted with the safekeeping and distribution of food donations:

*“it's not our food I mean it's donated food you got to be responsible so you can't it's not mine to give away so (..) it's the food bank's so.”*

Suddenly, the food remains the food bank's property and there is no mention of clients having a 'right' to it. In the previous segment the volunteer-client interaction is further shown as something fragile where volunteers "have to be careful" and maintain a professional distance between giver and recipient. After describing her more personal relationship with that one couple, she stresses that it "was still appropriate" given the moral expectations associated with her subject position as professional distributor of food aid. A potential clash with her previous identity of social worker is evident below where the question of giving direct advice is now sharply rejected:

*B: “so it were just sometimes sitting down having a drink with him and (..) just letting him talk really. (...) it's I know my boundaries because I come from a social work background so (..) it's you know. (..) You need to be careful but*

*I: Do you sometimes feel you can give people some advice? Or tell them where to get help or [..]*

*B: I don't give them advice! (..) You don't give anybody advice! [laughs] I would put options to them. Like with this particular person I'd say you could ring so-and-so.”*

Her strong rejection of giving 'advice' is followed by a modified version of offering "options" and, later in the interview, 'signposting' them to different organisations, both of which are considered less intrusive and direct in their approach but nevertheless put her in a privileged pastoral position of power from where moral guidance and direction can be issued. Clearly, B. does not want to be regarded as instructing clients or even offering professional advice herself, although the term 'options' still implies that she is in a position to formulate possible lines of actions before leaving ultimate responsibility to the client. Rather than directly impose her



expert knowledge to guide the conduct of her 'flock', the pastor here performs an intermediary role between the client and other expert services as she is aware of her imposed "boundaries" and the fragile legitimacy of the food bank visiting clients' homes where she is herself an invited guest. Instead, by "just letting him talk really", she performs her pastoral role by listening to clients' confession without judgment and seemingly without exercising any direct power over their moral conduct by instead referring to other agencies. Guided by a similar desire to speak with clients directly, the manager at SFB referred to her Christian faith and similar importance of building "personal relationships":

*"for me I come more from the Christian background, I'm just wanting to help my neighbour making sure that people have food and and what I have also discovered though (..) mhm through the years is that it's really the person the personal relationships you build or the connections that you make that can help people" (Manager, SFB)*

Keeping in mind her earlier problematisation of 'chaotic' lives and lack of resilience rather than income, the provision of food becomes dependent on building "personal relationships" and connections which can really "help people" by reintegrating them into Christian communities and guiding them towards desirable moral outcomes. When pressed about the nature of these relationships, she continued:

*I: "And do they talk to you about their problems?"*

*M: "Mhm not really, they're usually rushing or they keep the door very tight [laughs] umm but then another lady last week she invited me in for a cup of tea and because it was at the end of the day and I don't know I just she looked [laughs] as though she could do with somebody stopping for a cup of tea. Though she invited me into her flat to bring the food, so I dropped it off and I had a cup of tea and that was great you know we had a good conversation."*

This shows clients as potentially resisting the pastoral intrusion into their homes by ‘rushing’ the exchange of the food parcel and not letting the manager into their homes. This indicates some capacity for resistance among the flock (Martin and Waring, 2018) with pastors relying on the recognition of their legitimacy and willingness by subjects offering to speak of their problems. Given the manager’s experience and emphasis on building relationships, the normative expectation is for clients to speak and give an account of their problems to her as listening pastor in a compulsory extraction of personal knowledge (Foucault, 2002e) offering understanding and sympathy in a time of need and vulnerability. Through her experience and senior position at the food bank, she casts her pastoral gaze “rendering them amenable to surveillance by the expert” (Waring et al., 2016, p. 124) to identify a need for “somebody stopping for a cup of tea” where gaining access to the home then allowed her to have “a good conversation”:

*M: “Well I was able well I told so I told this lady about CAP and we also discovered that she was Catholic so I was able to tell her a bit more about because she'd only moved to the area recently so I was telling her a bit more about where she could find help uhh locally and I told her that uhh yeah where she lives is a bit of a , we do have a bit of a problem. You know, just invited her to keep in touch umm yeah things like that.”*  
*(Manager, SFB)*

Herself a practising Catholic, this personal encounter in the client’s home allowed the manager to diagnose the client’s needs and refer her to CAP for debt management and financial advice, again acting as intermediary between problematic client as stray sheep and orderly local communities. This diagnostic function from a highly relational position in a pastoral network therefore relies on the professional expertise of other agents where the food bank’s function is to identify needs (based on problematisations), establish trust through personal encounters and food provision before guiding clients onto other agencies. Even though most clients may remain distant and reluctant to allow the manager to enter, the manager outlined future plans

for setting up a “job club” in collaboration with CAP “to try and make a bit of a link there and try and you know maybe help them in that way” as the food bank’s expertise and legitimacy remains limited. This, however, presents a potential paradox where, through referral onto other services, the pastors effectively do abandon their flock in recognition that they themselves lack the necessary resources to ensure their salvation with volunteers frequently stressing the need for help and support beyond what the food bank can provide. Whereas for Foucault (2009c) the Christian pastorate was characterised by lifelong and consistent guidance by one pastor, the following sections will show how this individualising care for clients is distributed between different institutions and agencies.

## **Discipline, conditionality and limits of charity**

The previous sections on problematisations and parcel composition have already highlighted a strong moral concern with clients’ wrong choices and developing dependency on food banks as potential abuse of charity. This section will continue to show how these main problematisations of ‘chaotic’ lives and psychological deficits are addressed by food banks implementing an intricate disciplinary regime in partnership with other agencies. In addition to providing individualised care and guidance, these pastors perform a double-role (Waring & Latif, 2017, 4) as both “a ‘relay’ of surveillance and discipline” but also as promoters of “self-reflexive and self-governing subjects” defining normative expectations for appropriate conduct and enforcing these in their everyday practice. Pastoral power as a technology of governing (Oksala, 2013, p. 328) demands obedience and a continuous extraction of personal knowledge in order to normalise subjects’ conduct and guide them to wellbeing as salvation in this world (Foucault, 2002e) rather than the next. This presents an important paradox where pastoral power is both ‘distinct’ from political power and its institutions but also mainly concerned with “the worldly order of everyday conduct” (Carrette, 2013, p. 381) and always accompanied by “surveying gaze” (Siisiäinen, 2015, p. 234) seeking perfect transparency to illuminate subjects’ inner truths and return them to the normality of the flock when necessary. A disciplinary gaze of surveillance was evident across all three food banks where the provision

of food aid was conditional on both adherence to the disciplinary regime of referral agents and the subjectification of clients as actively seeking help and self-reform under expert guidance.

### ***Eligibility and referral***

As a direct result of their affiliation with the Trussell Trust, both LFB and WFB employ a referral system where vouchers are distributed by partner agencies to be redeemed at the food bank for a standard emergency parcel:

*“We have a system and we work with the Trussell Trust system where it's three vouchers in a six-month period because we are here for a crisis only not to be reliant on and depended upon” (Manager, LFB)*

She justified the standard limit of only giving a maximum of three parcels within any six-month period by insisting on the temporary nature of crisis (problematisation 1) but also draws on a wider discourse of welfare dependency and individual deficits (problematisation 2). At WFB, the manager went even further in rationalising the conditionality of the referral regime:

*“we're really keen to support people out of their situation, not ingrain them into it and so having a referral system like we do is a bit of a carrot and a stick in some ways in that we absolutely will help you if you're in need but it has to go hand-in-hand with you getting support from somewhere, does that make sense? So there has to be somebody who's looking into the bigger picture, the longer term who is a point of contact for you and foodbank is a part of that support package.” (Manager, WFB)*

Presenting a clear example of disciplinary intervention, support in the form of food provision has to go "hand-in-hand" with a willingness by clients to change and constitute themselves as active welfare subjects. The pastoral help is combined with a disciplinary gaze identifying any fecklessness and abuse through a “carrot and a stick” approach to then condition clients into demonstrating responsible conduct. The food bank becomes "part of that support package" in

a wider therapeutic and pastoral network where it specialises on immediate short-term relief but leaves any long-term intervention to other experts concerned with the “bigger picture” of personal recovery. As active subjects, clients are expected to engage and keep in ‘contact’ until the individualised causes of their crises are resolved.

Although as an independent food bank SFB was not bound by the same standard policies, the similarities in the deployment of a disciplinary regime were striking and equally informed by suspicions of material dependency:

*“on occasion we will take even even we'll take CAP clients a food parcel because everybody deserves the odd treat sort of thing [...] but that's not I wouldn't do that regularly so because the point is to make them independent of us, not dependent on us.” (Volunteer, SFB)*

Here, B. attributes a more active role to the food bank where the aim is not merely short-term support and referral but “to make them independent” and affecting psychological change in clients with flawed attitudes and behaviour hindering an escape from poverty or lacking the necessary skills and knowledge (problematisation 2). By providing the “odd treat” in addition to what is being provided through CAP, the food bank effectively has at its disposal an instrument of positive reinforcement with which successful transformation as active client may be rewarded.

In close partnership with CAP who would “pass it on to people that are vetted” (Volunteer), SFB relied on the organisation’s expertise where clients would first have to prove their genuine status:

*“B: if the client went to an agency and said they wanted a food parcel they would wherever the agency was the agency would make the decision whether it was genuine or not and then they would ring L. and say can I have a food parcel and they would it would go to the agency.”*

*B: “So they would do that and they would for instance if they wanted them to have food they would tell R. that yeah it was okay for the CAP clients to have uhh food parcels” (Volunteer, SFB)*

All interviewees at SFB emphasised that determination over eligibility was made by CAP and volunteer B. even strongly rejected any notion of decision-making by the food bank:

*“we wouldn't make the decision anyway because we will deliver it as long as the agency said they need it it would be the agency's decision whether they [...] even if we delivered every week to the person, it's still the agency who make the decision do they need the food”*

By placing full trust in CAP's ability to determine genuine status, volunteers deferred responsibility for determining entitlements to be themselves absolved from making individual assessments which would be at odds with their pastoral role discussed above. Although the exact eligibility criteria used by CAP remain unknown since this study did not include interviews with debt advisors, available online documents indicate that a similar disciplinary gaze is turned to clients in their homes as part of an initial examination:

*“When A. from the PLACE CAP Debt Centre visits CAP clients, he checks to see if the client has any food in the fridge. If they do not, he offers them food from the PLACE Trussell Trust foodbank. Around one third of the clients he visits require emergency food aid.” (CAP, 2015)*

While this may not be standard practice across all CAP centres, it still highlights the diagnostic function of the advisor tasked with determining genuine need where food vouchers are only issued for clients who are in obvious destitution without food in the home. In the absence of formal criteria like benefit claims or income levels, the determination of genuine status across all three food banks was instead linked to clients being recognised by referral agents as being in need. The variety of referral agents was particularly impressive at WFB, as the manager explained:

*“so we've got about I think 160 referral agencies now across the city, so they will be GPs, headteachers, social services, mental health teams, homeless teams, any those kind of frontline professionals I guess so that's where they would get a referral from, either they would approach that agency and present themselves as being in need and they would make a judgment call on that” (Manager, WFB)*

When asked directly about how that “judgement” call was made by the agencies, she evaded and simply stated that “the questions they would ask would probably vary depending on which agency you went to in all honesty”. Rather than formal criteria, the judgement about genuine need then requires clients to “present themselves as being in need” and constitute themselves as being worthy of charitable help in a performance of actively seeking support and not developing material dependency. For the manager at WFB, the refusal to make that “judgement call” herself was further linked to a Christian ethos of unconditional giving and unconditional love (see problematisation 3):

*I: “So when going to a referral agency, what are the sort of questions they might ask or the kind of information they might need from a person?”*

*L: “Yeah umm it's a tricky one really because from our point of view, and I have a whenever I go and train staff to be able to give out vouchers, I always explain that we don't have any criteria from foodbank's point of view, so it's not a tickbox system from you know, we're not like we just trust you guys to make good decisions because you know the people that you're working with umm so they don't have to be unemployed, they don't have to be on certain benefits any that kind of stuff, we're not the DWP, you don't have to prove anything”*

In rejecting any formal eligibility criteria as ‘tickbox’ exercise commonly used by formal welfare institutions, the food bank again presents itself as welcoming and more humane

alternative offering community-based support as opposed to failing state welfare (see problematisation 3). Yet, despite the common transfer of responsibility onto partner agencies, all vouchers are initially produced and given out by the food bank delegating their full ‘trust’ and authority to agencies. The key point for identifying genuine need then is to “know the people” as pastoral power requires the constant extraction of intimate knowledge by developing a personal relationship which again requires clients to confess their problems and commit to moral guidance under the pastor’s authority.

### ***Managerial discretion and competition between pastors***

Through the course of the interviews at SFB, it turned out that some exceptions were being made to the strict referral policy through CAP and some clients would visit the food bank directly, for example when referred by the job centre or in sudden emergencies. In these cases, the manager retained discretionary power and total authority over determining need and deciding how much food was given to clients:

*M: “If people come straight here I, I’ll often give them a food parcel if I think they’re kind of come across as being genuine I’ll give them a food parcel or even if I’m a bit worried I’ll give them a very small food parcel [chuckles] give them some emergency sort of food and then I’ll ask that they get in touch with one of the other agencies really because I think if people are in need they need more help than just the food bank can provide so I would suggest that” (Manager, SFB)*

Again, being given a food parcel is conditional on clients coming across as “genuine” in the examination of their personal crisis. Even the slightest doubt might then result in ‘worry’ and incur a penalty of only getting a smaller “emergency” parcel subject to seeking “more help” from affiliated partner agencies. This need for “more help than just the food bank can provide” is based on the suggested complexity of all three outlined problematisations and provides a rationale for engaging in a larger pastoral network where each partner can specialise and target their interventions accordingly. However, volunteers still retained some responsibility



for monitoring clients' conduct and worked closely with CAP through on-going communication between both organisations to coordinate care and disciplinary responses:

*B: "I personally make sure the the CAP manager here knows and say look they've had so many weeks is it okay or I [...] the ones that I do know I've got a relationship with them and I can sit down and say quite openly to them how are we getting on, is this sorted out money wise or is that and I'm fully aware and they text me anyway about their health and there's a lot of issues" (Volunteer, SFB)*

The personal relationship with clients again proves vital with the volunteer being in a position of pastoral authority from where a series of questions are asked of clients, who are then expected to give an account of their progress and display their on-going efforts to avoid developing any dependence on the food bank. To perform her pastoral duties, the volunteer keeps in touch with the clients via text messages to develop a better knowledge of their health needs and other 'issues' which are then evaluated before permission is sought from CAP to give out additional food parcels. At times, this necessary coordination between pastoral organisations became a source of conflict:

*"it is fairly long-term with them but it's genuine and we make sure that CAP at Bradford know that they're getting food 'cus otherwise you're undermining if CAP are getting the debt a plan to get out of their debt and everything if we keep giving them food and CAP don't know they're not really managing on their plan they've given them so you're actually undermining CAP really so you have to be, it has to be open and above board" (Volunteer, SFB)*

There is a tension here between providing food aid long-term, even to those deemed 'genuine', and abiding by the interventionist budgeting plan issued by CAP. A balance must therefore be kept between giving clients just enough food to survive and not giving too much which may

induce dependency and unworthy conduct. Otherwise, the authority of CAP and the pastoral regime would be in danger of being "undermined" by the food bank.

### ***Conditionality and the persistence of discipline***

Despite its wide use across all Trussell Trust food banks, the manager questioned the adequacy of the 3-in-6 rule and its capacity to deal with anything but short-term crises (problematisation 1). Observing a change in types of crisis beyond the dominant narratives of short-term emergencies, she acknowledges that three food parcels may not be enough to help with "increasingly common" long-term crises:

*"I definitely found probably in the last year that we get an increasing number of people where 3 foodbank parcels is not sufficient to get them through a crisis, whereas once upon a time it probably was quite a short-term thing but when you've got people in 8 week benefit delays, 3 food parcels isn't gonna get you through 8 weeks. [...] so 3 is not enough for that particular crisis of that period of time, so we're not talking about 3 separate crises during that 6 month period, we're talking about one long crisis in the middle of it and that's becoming increasingly common"*

*(Manager, WFB)*

After admitting that some food banks have since left the Trussell franchise out of discontent with the strict limits imposed through the voucher regime, she, however, continued to endorse the policy:

*"No I think it makes absolute sense from my point of view and it's never it's never really been a problem like say if we did on the rare occasion that we get people that hit that 3 mark um Trussell aren't saying you can't support them any further it's just having an informed decision about where you move forward with support and make sure that you*

*communicate with referral agencies about what's happening" (Manager, WFB)*

After hitting “that 3 mark”, clients are then met with an increasingly suspicious pastoral gaze trying to establish the exact reasons for continued reliance on food parcels, locating the cause firmly in underlying behavioural otherness (problematisation 2). Again, the communication and coordination with pastoral partners proves key to “move forward” and avoid dependency to instead enrol clients in their own reform under the guidance of agencies. Notably, despite not being bound by Trussell policies, the manager at SFB constructed a similar rationale:

*M: They decide and I think the agencies, they try to give, they'll help with the food parcel, they'll maybe see if they need a second one but they're very reluctant to give more than two because they don't want people to become dependent on them, they try to help people to work out how to manage their money and things as well. (Manager, SFB)*

While the initial parcels are given freely in recognition of the normality of short-term crises, continued reliance is met with reluctance and suspicion of material dependency regardless of economic circumstances problematised elsewhere (see problematisation 1). Where food parcels fail to solve short-term crises, a more interventionist approach is mobilised in partnership with CAP to educate clients “how to manage their money and things” as more adequate solution in the psychological transformation of clients into financially capable and responsible consumers which will be explored in the next chapter.

Despite the dominant self-presentation by food banks as charitable emergency responders, the complexity and extent of their disciplinary regime is less surprising when considering the long history of disciplinary solutions to poverty imposing rules of conditionality (Lister, 2004; Romano, 2017) as moral foundation and rationality for correcting deviancy. Romano (2017) shows how distinctions between the worthy and unworthy poor were formalised with the introduction of the Victorian Poor Law, including the 1723 ‘workhouse test’ which made relief

provisions for able-bodied individuals conditional on confinement to the workhouse as a place of moral correction and behaviour change. Victorian philanthropy was equally conditional on the poor demonstrating self-reliance and willingness to work which included home visits “as an instrument for caseworkers to derive a narrative of moral character, deservingness and helpability” (Livesey cited in Romano, 2017, p. 34) not unlike the visits to clients’ homes by CAP and volunteers at SFB. More recently, Harrison and Sanders (2016) identified similar behaviourist strategies in social policy which target members of the ‘broken society’ by combining empowerment discourses with more disciplinary modes of reintegrating the undeserving poor into communities and workplaces through mandatory workfare programmes.

## **The limits of emergency food interventions**

Whereas previous sections have already hinted at the insufficiencies and limitations of material food provision identified by food bank staff, this final section illustrates in more depth the discourses at work in rationalising behavioural interventions and “More than Food” approaches informed by problematisations 2 and 3. Specific to SFB in its rural location was a limited reach of the food bank and affiliated agencies where the manager found that in more remote areas “a good way of reaching them is through the churches and through the doctors so the GP surgeries and the churches” pointing to wider outreach through established institutions with existing pastoral networks where food aid becomes merely another added service.

However, all managers also raised the more general limitations of emergency food provision in addressing ‘complex’ needs beyond basic material provision. Despite the importance of food as immediate help in sudden crises (problematisation 1), its main purpose was not in its material sense itself but in its use as incentive and initial treatment to allow clients to then “do other things”. Providing temporary relief, clients were then said to be more receptive to behaviour change when the “big worry” of being unable to feed themselves and their children

had been lifted – albeit temporarily and under the condition that they seek additional guidance under the moralisation of another pastoral agency. Here the parcels are intentionally designed to provide only “some meals for a few days”, again to avoid dependency, but also to create enough incentive for self-transformation as subjects actively enrolled in their own treatment regime.

*“There is extra help there which I think is important cause it's yeah there's a limit to I mean [laughs] I mean food is very important to give to people, it gives them a sense of you know they can be satisfied with the food and then that can help them to do other things. I think especially for families with children I think it's a big worry when they can't feed their children so you can find if they can often if they can know that they can they've got some meals for a few days then they can actually do other things instead of cause the worry stops them from being able to do other things.”*

*(Manager, SFB)*

In addition to these material limitations, volunteers presented themselves as limited in their ability to offer necessary help beyond food and remained reluctant to position themselves as advisors as that role would be at odds with the sought distance from the formal welfare regime:

*“I mean I'm very aware that I'm not trained to give benefits advice or any other advice so we do err encourage people if people come directly to us we encourage them to go to the other agencies to get extra support and advice cause yeah they must they need help more than just hah a bag of food cause it's complicated out there [laughs] especially I think people with health you know sometimes they don't look after themselves very well so yeah.”* *(Manager, SFB)*

By admitting a lack of expertise, the manager also reinforced the need to work with other expert agents specialising in benefit and debt advice, making food poverty unsolvable through

“a bag of food”. Its construction as ‘complicated’ draws on previous problematisations of chaotic lives, personal deficiencies and ill health which go beyond material needs caused by structural factors to demand much more individualised interventions.

### ***Resisting institutionalisation***

At WFB, the manager reflected much more critically on the expansion and further institutionalisation of food banks and directly opposed referral policies by the local job centre:

*“We're seeing that sanctioning is such a massive issue or it was a couple of years ago that it felt like a conflict of interest to let the people who administer those sanction to go well we're gonna sanction you for 3 weeks but you'll be okay because here's a foodbank voucher and it kind of eases their moral conscience a little bit to have something to soften that blow I guess. So we were like it doesn't fit right with me for job centre advisors to have them centrally so we don't work with our job centre on that” (Manager, WFB)*

Unlike SFB, where referrals by the job centre were common and remained unchallenged, problematisations of benefit sanctions and other structural causes at WFB meant that the manager outright refused to accept their referrals. She defended the self-positioning as providing short-term aid in times of sudden crisis (problematisation 1) without becoming a useful outlet either to supermarkets who would ‘dump’ surplus food, nor to ease the moral conscience of job centre staff. As a ‘subject of doubt’ (Clarke et al., 2007, p. 141), she is capable of reflecting on – and then rejecting the governmental transfer of further responsibility onto the food bank. This highlights the unpredictable nature of subjection and possibility for resistance as discourses are never directly put into practice in linear fashion but re-interpreted, reflected upon and translated by multiple pastors – a complex process of discursive struggles where much can be lost during translation. Indeed, Williams, Goodwin, and Cloke (2014, p. 2807) have argued that food banks are not mere “dupes of neoliberal governmentality” but retain a degree of institutional agency in their operation with

considerable variability between sites. Yet, this complexity also shows the arbitrariness of the referral regime where voucher distribution is entirely in the food bank's control despite the discussed attempts to distance themselves from responsibility and decisions over entitlements. At WFB, the manager was equally critical of the local council who had underspent their hardship funds one year and instead sent over 600 families to the food bank:

*“we want to support people but there is a system there and the council have a statutory duty of care and if they're trying to preserve their funds and it's easy to let foodbank deal with it right, and that's not what we're here for [...] how are you ever gonna disappear if the council are paying you to do something that they should be doing, I know by the fact that we exist we're propping up a failing system, of course we are, but not in such an obvious way!” (Manager, WFB)*

Again in clear contrast to SFB who relied on local funding for their manager's position, the manager draws a clear line here between public responsibilities and the neoliberal drive toward shifting these onto the food bank. Whereas SFB and LFB had embraced further expansion and building closer links with businesses and local authorities, she positions herself outside the 'failing system' to demonstrate resistance against establishing new dependencies which lead to further institutionalisation. In principle, these examples show how managers and volunteers are capable of interpreting neoliberal discourses and making use of subversive tactics (Williams et al., 2014) at a local level, although overall these were very isolated instances where dependency on donations, volunteers and funding had overwhelmingly resulted in closer links with local authorities and businesses. More importantly, perhaps, managers' adoption of dominant discourses about individual responsibility, job readiness and economic utility warrants extreme caution: Williams et al.'s (2014, p. 2810) defence of food banks as “interstitial spaces of resistance” invites easy idealisations which ignore how neoliberal discourses adhere to no spatial boundaries and have real power effects in guiding even seemingly progressive practices.

## Conclusion

Staff across three different food banks, despite stark differences in organisation, size and location, all shared three distinct problematisations as ways of constructing causes and nature of food poverty. Although all acknowledged structural drivers and located main causes in the benefit system, analysis showed competing concerns with clients' 'chaotic' lives and inability to self-manage their lives to bounce back from crisis. Providing the rationale for checking eligibility and imposing conditionality, these constructions were linked to historic discourses of worthiness and disciplining the poor which are lived out, and at times contested, within food banks. The referral regime at both independent and Trussell Trust food banks was crucial to authenticate 'genuine' need; yet some managerial discretion exists, and long-term support remains conditional on clients offering a convincing performance of worthiness and demonstrating willingness for self-examination and actively seeking solution to individual crisis. Finally, a religious and conservative agenda of rebuilding broken communities based on functioning nuclear families and integration and close oversight over problematic members was at the centre of a proclaimed lack of community and neighbourly care, which also dominated the NFCs.

This chapter has further illustrated how pastoral practices across food banks balance discipline and subjectification "which together categorise, inscribe, normalise and monitor desirable subjectivities" (Waring & Latif, 2017, 15) in a pastoral network of organisations whose expertise and authority remain uncontested. As clients are asked to give an account of themselves to present themselves as genuine and explain the reasons for their crisis, volunteers could easily be misled but trust their gaze and ability to extract the truth from clients. Based on their research in formal health settings, Waring and Martin (2018, p. 147) stress that at least "an aspect of pastoral power remains disciplinary in character and akin to the overseer in the panopticon" with continual guidance and need to identify deviating subjectivities in stray sheep through "inspection practices". Such practices of on-going surveillance and monitoring of client conduct were evident across the volunteer-client



interactions where pastors are arguably better placed to extract personal truths from subjects through kindness and care, compared to external governmental agencies whose power is more easily recognised and resisted.

Further power effects became visible in the paternalistic care through composition of food parcels where clients remain equally passive recipients to be fed, as seen in chapter 4. Yet, the food banks were also shown to outsource many aspects of inspection to other agencies whose own pastoral gaze promises more direct insights into clients' personal lives in light of the outlined imperfections of single disciplinary gazes. Despite some evidence of local resistance against further institutionalisation, charitable food aid was shown to be conditional on becoming a successful neoliberal subject (Reid & Chandler, 2016) by developing a particular relation to the self as an active, responsible client seeking reintegration into the job market and becoming an informed consumer of advice services. The next chapter builds on these insights to explore how the discussed problematisations are put into practice across all three food banks in the form of "More than Food" approaches where pastoral power will be shown to merge with modern forms of therapeutic intervention in neoliberal crisis management.

## **6 ‘More than food’: Crisis management and the psychologisation of poverty**

The previous chapter has shown how food banks had deferred responsibility for deciding entitlements to partner agencies through the voucher system where volunteers and managers refused to make individual judgments which would clash with their pastoral position. Yet, managers also problematised the short-term impact of food parcels to demand more long-term solutions through individualised support and skills training. This chapter sets out to analyse the processes and power dynamics in these ‘signposting’ sessions directing clients to various partner agencies. Here, pastoral power will be shown to work through confessional rituals with volunteers taking up a listening and diagnostic function of authority. As clients are asked to give an account of their personal crisis, subjectification will be shown as performative, partial and relational where the constitution of neoliberal subjects requires truth extraction and obedience but also involves different pastors with varying areas of expertise. Then, I examine how the extracted knowledge of clients’ lives is utilised to inform individualised treatments with food banks increasingly specialising and centralising services in partnership with other agencies. I will then turn to examples of specific “More than Food” (MTF) courses which are informed by positive psychology and neoliberal rationalities in their targeting of skills deficits and activation of self-reflective and resilient clients. Examining the work of Christians against Poverty (CAP) as an exemplar of wide-reaching partnerships with expert agencies, the therapeutic discourses at work throughout this crisis management will be shown to work alongside distinctively non-neoliberal rationalities and more collective transformations where clients take an active role in adopting and reproducing dominant discourses.

## Food banks as therapeutic spaces



Figure 17 Signposting areas inside food banks

### ***Diagnosis, avowal and treatment of clients***

While direct interaction with clients at SFB proved to be limited due to its rural location and reliance on parcel deliveries, at the two Trussell Trust food banks personal conversations with clients are explicitly part of their routine. After being welcomed and having their vouchers checked by staff, who then continue to pack their food parcel (see previous chapter), other volunteers with specific ‘signposting’ roles invite clients to sit down in a separate area. Small desks for individual conversations are set up in this café-style area (see Figure 17) where the client sits across from a volunteer, usually clearly identified as staff by wearing green-coloured Trussell attire with logo and lanyard. Clients are then offered a hot drink, biscuits, and sometimes even a hot meal, and asked to explain their personal situation. Based on these conversations, clients are then signposted to partner agencies for “further support”, as the manager at LFB explained:

*“they get a red voucher from there, bring it along to one of our sites umm and then our signposters will sit down with them and have a conversation, a cup of tea with them and a biscuit and talk to them and find out if they’re getting the help that they need umm if they’re not getting the help that they need then we’d signpost them to an agency that can help them, whether it’d be CAP um and the other council one-stop*

*centres you know or anywhere like that so they you know we forward them we try to assist them with” (Manager, LFB)*

Similar to previous examples of SFB visiting clients in their homes, here too volunteers perform a diagnostic function identifying the nature of crisis to determine whether clients are receiving adequate treatment for their individual problem. As clients are waiting for their food parcel to be packed, they are expected to verbalise their genuine need once more as volunteers cast their pastoral gaze upon them as part of their inspection practices (Waring & Martin, 2018). This confessional space relies on a welcome atmosphere in a friendly encounter without any overt exercise of power.

At both WFB and LFB and their distribution centres, signposting sessions were said to have therapeutic effects on clients, since having expert advisors from different organisations present allowed more effective treatment of the ‘underlying’ problem:

*“so technically what they'll do is they help people with employment stuff, so they provide free courses and things like that. But they also can do low level benefits advice and that kind of stuff as well so we have a paid advisor in every one of our foodbank sessions now which is amazing (.) so they kind of sit in the corner with their laptop and when volunteers are chatting with clients if anything comes up that we haven't (.) because we're not experts (.) that we're not knowledgeable about [...] which um we found some really great results from so you know you get people who are expecting to just get a foodbank parcel when they come in but they actually go away with 3 or 4 other issues at least partly sorted when they leave”*

*“Umm the majority of people will go away much more uplifted than when they came in a lot of the time because we found that people would come in with really complex issues and we were just referring them back out to*

*Citizens Advice all the time which you know you might be waiting another week for appointment and then you don't know if they'll even gonna go to that appointment so to be able to just deal with it at that point of need is fantastic" (Manager, WFB)*

By offering more effective treatment for these 'complex' issues with the help of expert advisors, food banks then offered 'uplifting' effects freeing clients from the weight of benefit or debt problems. Again recognising her own lack of expertise, the manager relies on a wider pastoral network (see chapter 5) offering expert treatment following her initial diagnosis of crisis.

For Foucault (2002e), pastoral power is above all an individualising power deployed in the production of truthful knowledge of subjects. It is inherently relational, since the pastor must extract the inner truths from his 'sheep' to know them in their individuality, thereby further "binding the individual to the spiritual director" (Borg, 2015, p. 10) through subordination to his authority and moral-spiritual leadership. The ritualised confession clearly promises further 'uplifting' benefits to the confessing subject as it "exonerates, redeems and purifies him; it unburdens him of his wrongs, liberates him, and promises him salvation" (Foucault, 1978, p. 62) under the condition of strict adherence to pastoral guidance. At WFB, the absence of 'uniforms' and use of a welcoming space were intended to set the food bank apart from welfare institutions like the job centre and other authorities. This allowed a distinguished self-positioning as 'impartial' partners whose non-threatening character made clients "open up" and speak at length about their crisis and genuine reasons for needing a food parcel.

*"I think a lot of it is because we're impartial, we're not the council, we're not the job centre you know you can tell us whatever you like and it's not gonna affect anything. And we don't wear uniforms or anything like that so there's no like us-and-them situation and there's no time constraints, it's not like you've got a 10-minute appointment and so you just need to tell me the bits that you need to tell me. People will stay for like 2 hours and I also think that there's something probably very British about sitting*

*with a cup of tea across the table from somebody. And they just start to open up.” (Manager, WFB)*

Resisting and distancing herself from the council and job centre as places of power and division, the manager presents herself as offering a listening and understanding ear without time restraints which proves more efficient at building trust and extracting personal information. In fact, she further recounted how visiting council officials had watched with astonishment how “they tell you everything!” and wondered why “why do they not do that with us?” even though this may have helped with benefit payments. It is important to recognise here the productive effects of the confessional encounter for the constitution of clients as subjects of charity beyond merely extraction of information and disciplinary subjection to a referral and advice network which individualises poverty. Self-reflective truth-telling becomes a major focus in Foucault’s late works but Taylor (2009, p. 9) shows how the discursive self-constitution entails both techniques of domination, the focus of his earlier work, and self-care as ethical work on the self. For Foucault (2014a, p. 16), an act of avowal by a patient (client) is characterised and distinguished from a declaration or statement by the passing from the “realm of the unspoken to the realm of the spoken by voluntary constituting oneself” as a subject who then “obligates himself to being what he says he is” at some personal cost or difficulty, most often shame. It is performed in response to interpellations within a specific scene of address (Butler, 2005) where ‘clients’ are sat down and asked to give an account of their crisis in a situation which creates complex power dynamics between givers and receivers.

Discussing examples of sexual avowal and implications for identity, Butler (1997, 2005, 2016) too recognises the importance of avowal in the constitution of subjects – not just in relation to discursive conditions and expectations by an authority but by applying given problematisations to the self as appropriation of new identities. Just as Foucault’s (2014a) confessional subject must avow to *being* mad in order to be cured, signposting forms a crucial moment of subjectification where ‘clients’ must embrace a new understanding of self to overcome poverty within the offered terms of the diagnosis. They accept these not as imposed

identities but through relational self-constitution where those who fail to constitute themselves in expected ways as part of a social contract (Butler, 2016) are potentially excluded as unworthy or subjected to more rigorous disciplinary gazes (see chapter 5). This new self-understanding and recognition of crisis further prepares self-submission to treatment regimes and receiving tailored individual ‘support’ from other agencies. It therefore lays the normative grounds and expectations for the constitution of all food bank users, since individual avowals consolidate into norms for others (Butler, 2016) while normalising the discourse of food charity as only viable solution.

Historically, the religious ritual of confession (Taylor, 2009) relies on assimilation, verbalisation and most importantly interpretation by another: The ‘obscure truth’ by the confessor still had to be made sense of since “the one who listened was not simply the forgiving master, the judge who condemned or acquitted; he was the master of truth” (Foucault, 1978, pp. 66–67). Equipped with a “hermeneutic function”, this master’s function was therefore to interpret the confession and translate it into a discourse of truth that is compatible and itself productive within a larger discursive formation. Situated avowal further (Foucault, 2014a, p. 16) requires “a verbal act through which the subject affirms who he is, binds himself to this truth, places himself in a relationship of dependence with regard to another, and modifies at the same time his relationship to himself”. Understanding these confessional dynamics as productive acts of self-formation then breaks with the essentialism and empiricist reproduction of pathologising categories in existing research (see chapter 2): Clients are not naturally speaking as pre-existing subjects but made to speak as sufferers of personal crises and their avowal is then selected, interpreted and mediated by volunteers through different media, including websites, reports and case studies presented and objectified as the realities of food poverty.<sup>6</sup> To achieve this, all Trussell Trust food banks employ the same administrative system to record referral reasons along with personal details and volumes of given-out food.

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<sup>6</sup> Some of these case studies were included in my analysis of the Neighbourhood Food Collections in chapter 4.

At the same time, speaking the truth and confessing one's problems, or that which is "most difficult to tell" (Foucault, 1978, p. 59), becomes a desire for clients seeking understanding and recognition by others. Confessions are then always produced relationally, that is through power itself, where "we are compelled and internalize the compulsion, to search out and bring into light of day the truth of our selves, but in the process we create these truths, and create selves as products of power" (Taylor, 2009, p. 78). This is a crucial point, as the internalised compulsion and desire to speak may deliver feelings of relief and opportunities to constitute the self as worthy client requiring short-term help for crises outside of one's control. Of course, as Taylor (2009) shows by filling important gaps in her genealogical analysis of Foucault's 'confessing animal', this relationship brings with it the potential for false confessions where 'clients' could arguably follow volunteers' lead and present a 'false' referral reason or description of their circumstances. By drawing on Derrida, Taylor (2009) however shows the significance of pleasure and shame in the 'masochistic' desire for confessions where factual truths become secondary to therapeutic truths, if not irrelevant. Discussing Foucault's different conceptions of truth throughout his work, she convincingly argues that confessional rituals produce experiential truths where factually false statements are still made true by performative speech acts and reiteration: A narrative is then transformed from propositionally false into experientially true, since it has power effects and future consequences for the understanding of self, as subjects bind themselves to the account they give.

Moreover, the confessional presentation of self here remains 'excusatory' (Taylor, 2009) or apologetic by expressing and simultaneously transforming inner feelings which remain fragmented and inaccessible. In other words, the accounts given by clients cannot be 'fact-checked', as they produce inner truths, rather than expressions of established facts. Applied to signposting systems, it then makes no difference whether clients are *really* experiencing one or the other accepted referral reasons and types of crises. Perhaps with the exception of benefit problems, where documents could be checked by volunteers and advisors, clients' personal circumstances, family situation, health and economic status remain unverifiable but what



makes them ‘true’ is a convincing performance through verbalisation for recognition of need by the authority of the listening volunteer. By recording and disseminating these true experiences across case studies, clients’ identities are further tied to their individual condition and aims for recovery in narratives of salvation which normalise expectations of gratitude and moral indebtedness, while silencing any negative affect of resentment or anger along with any desire for social justice outside the community overseen by the pastorate.

### ***Therapeutic treatment and specialisation***

A recent report by the Trussell Trust (Hadfield-Spoor, 2018) aggregates and quantifies individual diagnoses based on survey and interview data from 141 of its food banks, to document the “underlying cause of the crisis” and specific health conditions as most frequent risk factors. Having obtained this data of individual conditions through confessions by clients discussed above, the report then categorises referral reasons and medical data to show that 38% of clients were suffering from mental ill-health while 23% had some other long-term health condition and 19% had a disability. Since food banks are reportedly unable to help with these issues directly, they are increasingly partnering “with external charities such as Mind to help people referred to them with mental health conditions” (Hadfield-Spoor, 2018, pp. 14–15), signposting people for appointments and even piloting a training programme for volunteers to provide mental health support at the food banks. Several food banks have started offering a mental health “drop-in” service “with supervisory support able to monitor changes and encourage those that attend”. Maintaining a strong focus on health monitoring, behaviour change and positive affect with utilisation of internal “assets” throughout, the report then emphasises the need for “tailored signposting and guidance in foodbanks, and social inclusion work such as community choirs” (Hadfield-Spoor, 2018, p. 23). The overall aim then is “to support the transition from crisis to a sustainable living” (Hadfield-Spoor, 2018, p. 24) through more personalised and specialised support, providing community spaces for meetings and develop lasting relationships.

Without a single direct reference to therapy or therapeutic relationships, advocated solutions remain based around “support”, giving “hope” and facilitating better “access” to existing services. Combining these different services in a single space is further said to provide more immediate treatment but such co-location of services (Hadfield-Spoor, 2018) is also claimed to be more cost-effective, increase uptake and communication and be more efficient in non-clinical settings where clients “feel welcome and listened to”. However, at WFB and LFB this spatial organisation was also a reaction to pastoral failures where clients would often fail to follow instructions and make appointments or visit other agencies for support. In response, demonstrating once more the persistent disciplinary aspects of pastoral power, a newly opened centre by LFB was to also have advisors directly on site since clients could not be trusted to follow up and seek the necessary treatment after receiving a food parcel:

*“another site that we’re due to open in a fortnight they will actually have on the premises where we’re opening the food bank they’ll have a job shop, money buddies umm CAP anybody that’s in fuel poverty and things like that so all the advice will be there on site. We have found that if they’re on site, the agencies are on site, then clients are more willing to take up the offer of speaking to ‘em there and then rather than us actually saying well if you ring this number” (Manager, LFB)*

The bundling of service provision combined with employment and skills training targeting diagnosed deficiencies is widely endorsed by the Trussell Trust (Hadfield-Spoor, 2018) as more effective treatment where the spatial setting and welcoming atmosphere have proven vital for the voluntary engagement by clients in the treatment process. Similar to a hospital which houses different experts who can refer patients and share resources among one another, the food bank provides shared facilities and spaces while minimising distances and costs at the same time. Neoliberal concerns with more effective and preventative direct interventions in identified risk areas further present a response to problematisations of irrational clients not acting in their rational self-interest, hence requiring adjustment of material choice

architecture (Manzano, 2016) able to nudge subjects into achieving better health and employment outcomes. Such policies then have their own constitutive dynamics for “active welfare subjectivities” where “the aim is not the job, but the generic skill, attribute or disposition of employability” (Friedli & Stearn, 2015, p. 41) demanded by positive psychology. Such instrumental behaviourism operates through a strengths-based discourse of desirable skills, attitudes and necessary work on the self and is clearly visible here in the on-going specialisation of signposting and referral systems which impose psychologised diagnoses of crises followed by joint corrective treatments at the level of subjectivity.

Finally, the partnerships and mutual referrals between food banks and advice agencies have additional implications for the discussed processes of subjectification. Going beyond Foucault, Butler (2016) raises important questions of refusal and possible consequences of unsuccessful or incomplete avowal never producing a static or finished subject. Understanding avowal as performative then means that it does not produce a fixed subject but offers “the occasion for a further making” (Butler, 1997, p. 99) since “a subject only remains a subject through a reiteration or rearticulation of itself as a subject, and this dependency of the subject on repetition for coherence may constitute that subject's incoherence, its incomplete character”. The signposting sessions then only present one of many partial moments of subjectification where clients are never fully formed through confession and subjection to an expert treatment regime but remain in a continuous state of becoming successful neoliberal subjects by building capacity and repeatedly confessing and adapting to new crises (Chandler, 2016a). While it is therefore not possible to ‘free’ the food bank subject from confessional practices or return them to a blank state (Lorenzini & Tazzioli, 2016), creation of alternative spaces for the making of other subjectivities and different power dynamics which reduce domination always remain a possibility. Repeatedly pointing out fractures and contingencies in the histories of confessional practices, Foucault himself refers to the “political dimension” of refusal and reinvention by becoming other than what we are, rather than binding ourselves to offered identities by confessing what we are (Taylor, 2009). The constant need for verbalisation of

referral reasons as inner truths and avowing to these “underlying reasons” was indeed shown to be part of a larger expert culture enforcing an on-going and necessarily partial and incomplete chain of subjectification which nevertheless exercises power by guiding conduct, deciding entitlements and fixing identities while silencing alternative solutions. As clients are continually asked to avow and speak the truth of their ‘problems’, they become actively enrolled in their own subjectification as recovering patients while producing a highly individualised knowledge necessary for their transformation into resilient subjects.

### **‘More than Food’ programmes**

Having established the constitutive dynamics and power effects in confessional and diagnostic processes in food bank settings, this section now turns to specific examples of treatment regimes and intervention strategies deployed in collaboration with expert agencies and businesses. Based on the insufficiencies and limitations of material food provision identified in the previous chapter, the Trussell Trust has launched a pilot programme titled “More than Food” (MTF) which is gradually being rolled out across its national network of food banks. By envisioning food banks as ‘community hubs’, it combines a social mission with an increased focus on prevention and local service delivery. So-called add-on services of money advice and cookery courses are deployed “to build resilience and help prevent people from needing a foodbank again” in hope “that with these skills people will become empowered to break the cycle of poverty” (Trussell Trust, 2018d). The official website (Trussell Trust, 2018b) further sets out the specific aims of the course:

- *“To equip people with cookery skills and the confidence to build upon these skills in their day to day lives so that they are able to prepare and eat healthier food.*
- *To give an understanding of how to plan meals, both from an economic and a nutritional point of view.*
- *To teach people simple financial management techniques to enable them to budget more effectively and avoid getting into debt.”*

Among the course benefits the TT then lists “promoting a better understanding of a balanced diet” based on NHS guidance, learning cooking skills and enjoying the health benefits of switching from ready meals, and an “increase in confidence in the kitchen and willingness to taste new things”. In addition, the programme claims to be “addressing some of the mental health needs that people may be facing” drawing on general evidence of the importance of food for mental wellbeing. It is based on the fundamental assumptions of vulnerability as barrier to becoming resilient subjects (Reid & Chandler, 2016) with psychological deficits and impediments to their choice-making and information processing capacities where people must first be ‘equipped’ with the necessary skills and knowledge. Larger discourses of economic and nutritional expertise further lend authority and scientific basis to the programme, presenting a strategy of empowerment where successful participation will leave people “able to prepare and eat healthier food” and cope better with future financial difficulties. The strong emphasis on confidence and skills building problematises a lack of positive affect requiring a right attitude and reconnection with food while building confidence. Education then serves to inculcate money and cooking skills necessary for the self-transformation from vulnerable client into resilient subject able to break “the cycle of poverty” by taking responsibility as able-minded subject. Such targeting of cognitive deficits (Chandler, 2016b) problematises a lack of knowledge and wrong personal choices with educational intervention promising corrective reconnection and facilitating access to available resources which must be reflexively utilised and internalised by practicing responsible self-care. Much like the medical discourse of recovery explored in chapter 4, the strong preventative focus aiming to “avoid getting into debt” targets barriers to adaptation while promising more effective economic use of limited financial resources without ever questioning the origins of debt or problematising low incomes.

A recent report by the Edinburgh Food Project (Tulloch, Borthwick, & Friend, 2018) on the development of the MTF programme provides another example of Trussell-funded research reinforcing the therapeutic expansion of food banks which “play a pivotal role in helping their

clients tackle the causes of their food poverty by providing access to expert advice and support services”. In this survey, the researchers asked food bank clients “to explain the causes of their food crises and then prioritise the advice and support services they would most likely use to help with their problems” to conclude that

*“Client demand is strongest for mental health and benefits advice and support services. Clients also prioritised help with utility bills, debt, housing and employment. Volunteers’ accounts of their conversations with clients corroborated this profile of client demand. [...] When focused on debt and ‘income maximisation’ services, client demand is strongest for help with benefits, skills training, budgeting and debt but weaker for help with employment.” (Tulloch et al., 2018, p. 2)*

Particularly striking here is the use of marketised language identifying and measuring “client demand”, making food bank users into service consumers in a new ‘economy of poverty’ (Selke, 2017). Constructing a ‘profile’ of demands for various services, volunteers are again given a privileged position of authority from which they ‘corroborate’ clients’ needs based on the discussed confessional rituals. In measuring demand for different categories of services, the researchers already impose these as only possible options, all of which target food poverty at individual level and locate crisis in a personal lack of information and access to expert services. In adopting language of supply and demand, structural issues of “low income and problems with benefits, homelessness, unemployment, and debt” (Tulloch et al., 2018, p. 3) are reduced to mere “triggers” for individual “food crises”, thus retaining crisis itself as treatable and manageable condition. Again, poverty is medicalised where the problem becomes effective therapeutic intervention, declaring that “generalist advisers providing drop-in services would be preferable because clients have multiple chronic problems, akin to medical patients with co-morbid illnesses”. The clear positioning of clients as ‘patients’ pathologises complex “underlying problems” as diagnosable and treatable medical conditions requiring expert intervention within the therapeutic space of the food bank:

*“Other common responses were that foodbanks were a logical venue for such services because clients were by definition in crisis and needed help or just someone to talk to, and that clients found foodbanks a positive, welcoming or friendly environment.” (Tulloch et al., 2018, p. 6)*

As seen in the combination of services at LFB and WFB, the food bank becomes a central hub for “crisis” and presents a therapeutic space where the physical presence of advisors makes uptake of services more likely. Tulloch et al. (2018) conclude their report by contrasting the traditional ‘humanitarian aid’ in the form of material food provision (see chapter 5) with the need for more ‘development aid’ said to “to build clients’ capacity to better manage their circumstances and address the causes of their food poverty”. Clearly guided by a neoliberal discourse of responsibilisation and maximisation of internal capacities (Chandler, 2016a; Han, 2017) such advocacy for MTF services targets individual skills deficits and locates causes firmly inside the individual. Drawing on interview data and supporting documents, the next section explores how these rationalities are informing food bank practices and implementations of the “Eat well – spend less” programme.

### ***‘Eat well – spend less’***

At WFB, these non-food programmes were being welcomed due to their preventative character where material provision would only address an ‘initial need’ which had to be followed by more long-term behavioural intervention. Whereas the material food provision becomes an expression of Christian ‘love’ and pastoral care, the programme manager attributes a ‘frustrating’ role in its incapacity to solve causal issues leading people to need a food parcel in the first place. The preventative promise then directs the pastoral gaze onto the individual client and their internal capacities, rather than external factors, promising to provide the ‘answer’ through individual resilience-building.

*“so this is the bit that I'm interested more is how do we do more preventative stuff because one of the more frustrating things with food banking in some ways is that it's great that we can love people when they*

*come in and we're providing that initial need but (.) a food bank parcel is not the answer [chuckles] umm and so what can we do to stop people from needing to use it again" (Manager, WFB)*

In an official TT video documenting this 6-week programme, a project coordinator further elaborates on the rationale and therapeutic potential of the 'Eat well – Spend Less' course:

*[Eat Well Spend Less Coordinator]: Eat Well Spend Less is a 6-week course which aims to help people on low incomes to budget and to cook from scratch. The people who will benefit from the Eat Well Spend Less course typically are either people who have been to a foodbank directly or they're people who the foodbank works with through referral agencies. So the referral agency would proactively send people to a course. Hopefully before they fall into a crisis because we think that prevention is better than cure. There are two recipes that people get demonstrated to before they split up and will make the recipe for themselves. We think it's really important that people get hands-on, it's about connecting people with the food because so often in our society we're just really really disconnected from the food. And often people just don't have confidence with food because it's not something they've ever experienced before. [...] We also focus in each session on a couple of activities which will open discussion based (.) and these activities focus on things such as planning menu, planning household budget, looking at different types of credit and looking at the Eat Well guidance from the NHS." (Trussell Trust, 2016b)*

While the reliance on referral networks and behavioural diagnosis of clients deemed to be at risk has already been discussed above, here the coordinator also stresses the preventative appeal of the programme. Remarkably, referral agents are tasked with identifying vulnerable subjects on "low incomes" to "proactively" send them onto a course, rather than the food bank signposting clients to the service. The use of medical language ("prevention is better than



cure”) constructs poverty as natural but preventable condition, while normalising the danger of ‘falling’ into indeterminate crises as a constant risk factor. As Harwood (2009, p. 25) shows, such interventions in the name of health and wellbeing operate through ‘biopedagogies’ providing instructions on how to live, aimed not only at health but personal beliefs and behaviours to transform and optimise vital characteristics: Together, these ‘true discourses’ of scientific expertise seek to alter bodies and minds by teaching new “micropractices in the constitution of the self” said to be required for becoming active and resilient subjects. Rose (2001b, p. 18) too points to new pastoral concerns with individual health and risk management becoming a new form of ‘ethopolitics’ which “concerns itself with the self-techniques by which human beings should judge themselves and act upon themselves to make themselves better than they are”. The course then seeks to inculcate vulnerable subjects with these necessary life skills in somatic strategies of empowerment which are easily embraced by subjects as fun activities in a social environment with instantly visible results and financial incentives rewarding positive behaviour change. Said to be ‘disconnected’ from food and without confidence, the course then also serves a social function by reintegrating people after restoring a seemingly natural biological connection in basic knowledge of food as vital resource along with money.

The course also demonstrates the interplay of disciplinary subjection and subjectification as ethical self-formation: Dominated by normative expectations and scientific knowledge on diet and lifestyle by the NHS, it provides moral guidance to volunteers as pastoral authorities who must then translate the discourses into practice (Martin & Waring, 2018). Pastors may then diagnose and problematise individual skills deficits and bad habits to provide advice and signposting to prescribe a tailored training regime through cooking and budgeting, effectively locating their pastoral function not just in disciplinary intervention but in the activation of subjects now able to manage and monitor their own habits. As such, the course requires and promises active engagement as participants are made to recognise their own duty to be well and find *their* way out of poverty through reflexivity, self-work and capacity building. In

return, participation holds the promise of becoming successful neoliberal subjects monitoring and disciplining themselves through responsible spending, budgeting and enacting a healthy lifestyle, all deemed preventative factors which can be built up as internal protection against future, unnamed but seemingly inevitable crises.

On the MTF website, the Trussell Trust presents a client statement testifying to the positive effects of the course:

*“Since attending the course, Judith has managed to reduce her food bill and has gained more confidence in her ability: “It changed how I spent my money, now I am spending a third less on food as a result of the course. I am making big savings and I am using the money I am saving to pay off some of my other debts.” [...] Without the course, Judith could still be struggling to buy essentials such as food for her family and, possibly, getting into even more debt. She may have even had to use the foodbank by now.” (Trussell Trust, 2018d)*

This narrative of transformation presents Judith as a successful course graduate who has not only changed her personal circumstances but her very psychological essence. From overspending on food bills, she now has renewed “confidence in her ability” and can testify to changes in her spending habits. Offering normative orientation for all future clients, her adaptive journey to becoming a rational subject is conditional upon making effective use of limited resources and being willing to learn new skills and exorcising bad habits: Instead of spending excess money on food she is now saving and repaying debts, as her subject positions demands of a responsible client acting within a market-based environment. While the narrative serves to document her recovery and survival, it never problematises the origins of her debt problems and financial trouble, as she is instead shown to be rehabilitated on a psychological level with restored resilience preventing her from needing a foodbank in the future. In the absence of any reference to structural changes to external factors causing poverty, it firmly locates the cause entirely inside individual capacity, self-confidence and

wrong choices which are all constructed as modifiable through education and reflexive adaptation.

The course materials further position food banks as partners in wider provisions of educational money management courses combined with debt advice. The very explicit problematisations of lacking budgeting and financial capacity below then ascribe a diagnostic and pastoral function to volunteers identifying ‘need’, building relationships with clients and administering initial treatments before signposting them into more intensive courses targeting individual ‘capacity’ for budgeting on small incomes:

*“Our Financial Triage and Debt Advice project provides a framework through which foodbanks can assist in identifying and acting on the debt needs of individuals referred to the foodbank service. It creates intentional links with a local advice agency and puts in place a triage process through which the urgency of the debt situation can be assessed and acted on appropriately, to ensure that the client engages with the help that they need.” (Trussell Trust, 2018c)*

*“The Budgeting & Money Management project is based around a single meeting at a foodbank centre. Trained volunteers talk to foodbank clients about their budgeting capacity and financial situation, and providing a simple engagement at that point. This can then develop into additional longer-term work with that person, as they begin to take steps to resolve issues with their budgeting and financial capacity.” (Trussell Trust, 2018c)*

The now familiar medical discourse promises immediate emergency treatment through ‘triage’ of financially injured clients whose vulnerability is defined by their ability to budget and their “financial capacity” as key quality required for successful recovery, while the circumstances of the injury or responsible perpetrators remain absent. Treatment then requires individual

assessment but also attributes an active role to the client who must ‘engage’ with offered help, take up the offered subject position, adapt their relationship to the self and show responsibility by repaying any debts owed to guarantee the functioning of capitalist markets.

The manager at WFB, where the programme had been piloted and was now being rolled out across the centres, also praised the simplicity of the course where new skills could easily be practiced at home and “cooking from scratch” was specifically taught by using “really low-cost ingredients”. Far from changing systemic conditions, the course demands more efficient and “cost effective” behaviour and teaches survival strategies requiring adaptation of individual eating habits and buying choices to the now accepted and normalised realities of living on a low income:

*L: “They will do cooking from scratch so they’ll make things like soup or spaghetti bolognese or whatever from scratch with really low-cost ingredients and trying to show people that cooking from scratch is not that scary and that’s it much more cost effective than buying things ready-made. So we do a little bit of that, we make a sweet and savoury tweak and then in dispersed between the cooking is (.) real basic money management stuff and a little bit about like credit and how APR works and all of that kind of stuff, we have to be really careful because we’re not financial advisors.” [Manager, WFB]*

Notably, the practical cooking exercises are “dispersed” among the debt advice and financial education, a combination which is more likely to increase uptake as a more subtle behavioural intervention promising fun, immediate benefits and a seemingly common-sense solution to food poverty. The manager was very aware of the dangers of any more direct nudging and also maintained a non-expert advisory role merely equipping clients with needed information without ever explicitly “telling people not to do certain things”. The example below shows this careful manoeuvring and active negotiation of her pastoral position in relation to other agencies with more expertise where the food bank must not become a possible competitor:

*“L: Yeah we have to be really careful like (.) that we're not telling people not to do certain things umm but we do err so for example we [have] an activity around imagining if your washing machine broke down and you needed to buy a new washing machine, and we would say you know washing machine costs £400 and these are all different places you could credit for that and then they have to put them in the order of the least expensive to the most expensive [...] and then you turn the card over and it's got actually what you would pay back and that's been real helpful because visually they can see that it's not a good idea to go to BrightHouse but we're not saying don't get into BrightHouse, does that make sense?”*

Again, cognitive skills deficits mean that clients must be made to ‘visually’ see the possible difference made by the desired behaviour change before putting it into practice. The manager therefore remains reluctant to lecture people and makes great efforts to leave their choices intact. Instead, they must be trained to exercise their own freedom through responsible decision-making in line with the subject position of a self-interested rational choice actor. So, while clients may be supported by presenting different options and subtle nudging into favourable directions, they only become successful neoliberal subjects by making an informed choice for themselves. Agency and empowerment then become strategies of government for such pastoral regimes “treating individuals' freedom to choose as a critical tool for the realisation of objectives, and acting on this freedom by equipping subjects with the right ideals and ambitions to choose wisely” (Martin, Leslie, Minion, Willars, & Dixon-Woods, 2013, p. 84). The neoliberal subject is therefore neither fully free nor oppressed but being held captive in a continual process of developing “adaptive capacity” (Reid & Chandler, 2016, p. 15) in individualised crisis management while exercising their own freedom to achieve better financial and health outcomes. Giving direct instructions or advice would be at odds with creating an entrepreneurial subject, as neoliberal governmentality seeks to minimise direct

intervention (Binkley, 2018) in favour of more distanced constructions of market environments built upon the principle dilemma of not governing too much (Foucault, 2008a).

At WFB, meanwhile, the course also reinforces motivations and increases morale among volunteers, since it offers gratifying effects with immediately visible results of behaviour change, as opposed to more long-term structural changes which remain distant and invisible.

*“I just wish I could spend the majority of my time doing Eat Well Spend Less and less time doing foodbank because that's like you see real instant results with people” (Manager, WFB)*

Yet, the manager also offered some critical reflections and at least temporarily doubted the rationale for the intervention, demonstrating once more how discourses are rarely ever directly materialised but must be put into practice by interpreting actors in a given situation. Her multiple self-positioning as non-judgmental and non-presuming should be seen as constitutive of her own subject position through performative story-telling (Bosancic, 2016), as she later returned to fully endorse the course without any explicit criticism of Trussell Trust policies.

*“I've found it hard actually when we give money and budgeting advice because you find a lot of foodbank clients actually can budget their money far better than I can cause they have to, they have to know exactly where every single penny goes and exactly how much this costs in this shop and so on and so they have real tight budgets and they know to the penny where they're spending everything [...] but I suppose it is difficult isn't it, because you never really I just never presume that I know any more or less than the people that are coming in [laughs]” (Manager, WFB)*

Here, the interventionist rationale for capacity-building is clearly at odds with her positioning of well-informed clients, who are already forced by the material living conditions to adapt their consumer conduct accordingly. Given the combination of debt advice, cooking, nutrition and

money management training, however, the course is still more likely to identify at least some cognitive gaps in participants and leave them with some benefits, even if it is just learning new recipes or enjoying the social aspects.

*“And I think recently as well Trussell have found it's such a brilliant programme and it just makes sense that they are letting external agencies purchase it, so I rang them the other week and said all of my children's centres have said they would love to run this with parents at the schools but obviously we don't have the time capacity to do all of that so Trussell have basically amended it so it's got less foodbank talk in it I guess and said well they can purchase it as a product from us so it wouldn't come under PLACE foodbank's banner so we're not responsible for it but they can run it from their children's centre” (Manager, WFB)*

Overall then, the manager returned to praise the success of the “brilliant programme” which has since become increasingly marketised and rolled out into other settings, including schools. There it becomes a purchasable and marketable professional service where financial viability and competitiveness are important considerations within the new ‘economy of poverty’ (Selke, 2017). It also presents an adjustable product which can be tailored to individual requirements with “less foodbank talk in it” to provide similar interventions in different settings. As seen in chapter 4, poverty relief programmes become increasingly commodified in close links with other institutions and businesses. Initially funded through donations by the founder of moneysupermarket.com (Trussell Trust, 2018d), the expansion of the MTF courses is now mainly financed through monetary donations by Tesco through the Neighbourhood Food Collections and a new £20m partnership between the Trussell Trust, FareShare and the retailer Asda.

While the use of positive psychology and CBT-based approaches in jobcentre environments and government workfare programmes has been heavily criticised by some psychologists (Friedli & Stearn, 2015), similar strategies coercing people into behaviour change in food

charity programmes have so far gone unscrutinised. Indeed, the MTF course was shown to work through similar mechanisms of psychologisation and ‘psychocompulsion’, understood as “the imposition of psychological explanations for unemployment, together with mandatory activities intended to modify beliefs, attitude, disposition or personality” (Friedli & Stearn, 2015, p. 42), while constructing structural causes as merely peripheral and out of reach guided by problematisation 1 (see chapter 5). Although there are distinct differences in the ways conditionality and discipline are put into practice in food bank settings compared to sanctioning and mandatory workfare programmes in the formal welfare system, positive psychology and its eager application in neoliberal treatments of poverty are clearly visible here. The on-going marketisation of the MTF course as a purchasable treatment protocol promising restoration of able-bodied consumers with the right mentality and capacity to perform within markets then indicates new and increasingly complex links towards a possible merger between an existing psy-complex (Rose, 1998) and an expanding Hunger Industrial Complex (Fisher, 2017).

Specifically, new partnerships between food banks and the mental health charity Mind warrant further critical analysis, given that Mind equally base their services around a resilience model where services are “driven by principles of positive psychology, and psychological therapies including Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT), Interpersonal Psychology (IPT) and also mindfulness” (Bragg, Wood, & Barton, 2013, p. 20), none of which address the structural and relational causes of trauma outside the individual. Moreover, the influential discourse of positive psychology itself plays a key role in producing neoliberal subjectivities (Binkley, 2011) with its therapeutic cultivation of emotional states, clearly visible in participants’ praise of the MTF service, and the problematisation of unreflective passivity and dependence. The spatial design, co-location of services and partnership with on-site advisers inside food banks all serve to reduce this docility and nudge clients into actively engaging with offered services and thereby take responsibility for their ‘crisis’. The following chapter will build on these insights to discuss the impacts of neoliberal psycho-politics as a



“machine of positivity” (Han, 2017, p. 32) demanding constant self-optimisation but also producing feelings of joy and accomplishment in the production of resilient subjects.

### ***Social spaces and ‘job clubs’***

Very briefly, this section now turns to other non-food interventions and courses run in close collaboration with Christians Against Poverty (CAP), who were already shown to play a key role in the wider pastoral network offering expertise and delivering parcels for SFB. Closer examination of this partnership and the courses offered to clients here reveals some non-market-based rationalities with a very different emphasis on community, friendship and religious faith possibly at odds with the identified neoliberal conceptions of rational individual actors. I will then account for this complexity and the often contradictory character of governing practices in neoliberal societies (Brady & Lippert, 2016) by drawing on additional documents and videos produced by CAP to reconstruct the dominant discourses and emerging power effects in the pastoral regime. However, given the focus of this study and necessary limitations in scope, I will concentrate on the immediate links with food banks and overlaps in practices without a comprehensive analysis of CAP services which form a separate institutional network with distinct organisational structures and differing objectives as a self-declared ‘debt counselling charity’.

While all 3 food banks work in close partnership with CAP and volunteers would “refer to them a lot for debt advice and they also run like money management courses so we try and get people on to them when they come up” (Manager, WFB), WFB was now even merging with the local CAP centre, as the manager explains:

*“we’re kind of fortunate here because this last year we’ve changed our foodbank time here to coincide here with the CAP manager being in and she sits in the same space that foodbank operates in so they’ll be and then we’ll have lunch together in the middle of that, so it’s hard to explain really if you imagine it’s like a cafe downstairs there’s foodbank clients*

*coming in speaking to volunteers but there's also CAP clients who are invited to come in and have a cup of tea and a chat and get support so the two lots of clients are merging a little bit. And then we provide food at the end of it, so foodbank clients want to stay they can stay for that but then there's obviously CAP staff around so we're not just going here's a telephone number, we recommend that you ring them, we're like here's the manager! [laughs] Make an appointment kind of thing so that's where it's working really really well just kind of merging the two so it's like a CAP drop-in and foodbank in the same space basically.” [Manager, WFB]*

Clearly ahead of SFB who were still at the planning stage of establishing a ‘café style area’, this shared social space brings with it some potentially very different power dynamics from the examined diagnostic space of the standard signposting sessions explored in previous sections. Food bank clients are no longer isolated and seated in confessional encounters but still offered a “cup of tea” and a chat before receiving tailored ‘support’ in a shared, informal and non-threatening space which blurs the boundaries between debt and food crises. The ‘merging’ of CAP and food bank clients brings together the two sets of patients promising more effective treatment with multiple pastors not only partnering but now working within the same setting. Both organisations then share their Christian ideology and pastoral practices in guiding their now combined ‘flock’ to return it to the community and use food as an expression of Christian care. Once more, the space allows proximity to advisors and nudging clients who otherwise cannot be relied upon to make appointments with separate agencies. Whereas the signposting sessions are focused on diagnosing the specific ‘underlying issue’ for further treatment, the partnership with CAP also served to address problems around loneliness and social isolation (problematism 3):

*“there's more to it than just food so the more general support people can provide the better the CAP the way they have befrienders who go and meet*

*people and keep in touch with them, that seems to work very well.”*

*(Manager, SFB)*

‘Meeting people’ and addressing social isolation became the main motivations for SFB integrating a drop-in centre where clients would “then meet other people and find that they’re not, that they’re not on their own, they’re not the only people with these problems”. With isolation being a “big issue” particularly in their rural area, the manager at SFB then argued that “many of them they want to be able to sit down and have a chat really and I think that would help them more” than a food parcel. Increasingly, the food banks then respond to the problematisation of failing societies (see chapter 5) by offering a return to a lost sense of Christian community and neighbourhood. The emphasis on building communal spaces was also linked to a temporary escape from poverty with therapeutic benefits from socialising, making friends and joining different church activities.

*“we do find that this was like the social side of it was such a big thing that now each of our churches have like a social space on another day of the week which is run by the same volunteers that run the foodbank sessions, so for example like here on a Monday you’d have a foodbank session and you might find that people really want to talk and they’re really just hungry for being around people, you can say that’s great we’re also here on a Wednesday lunch time you’re very welcome to hang out with us then, so that’s not a foodbank environment, it’s just you can come and read the paper or you can come over and play chess or bring your kids or whatever you wanna do and just be for a few hours.” (Manager, WFB)*

As the manager makes very clear here, despite being connected to the sessions, this communal space is “not a foodbank environment” where ‘pastors’ are now instead concerned with satisfying a different kind of hunger “for being around people”. Integrating stray ‘sheep’ into the church community then becomes a very different task with a collectivising function compared to the diagnostic, individualising and often disciplinary function of volunteers

discussed in chapter 5. This shows the multiple and temporary nature of positions that pastoral agents take up, as they act as intermediaries between different institutions and the wider community where they are themselves not outside of power (Waring & Latif, 2017) but equally constituted through ‘inter-subjectification’ by interpreting and putting into practice available rationalities. As both members and leaders of community, here they act as “conduits of governmentality” (Waring & Martin, 2018, p. 141) in aiming to translate these discourses of Christian community into situated practices.

Now being rolled out nationally in close partnership with the Trussell Trust and endorsed as an employment programme by the Department of Work and Pensions, CAP ‘job clubs’ (CAP, 2016) combine practical skills training with “emotional support” and social activities in a group-based setting. Compared to services run by the food bank themselves, the religious connotations are much clearer here with CAP promising that “through CAP Job Clubs your church can create a community that demonstrates God’s love in a relevant way” (CAP, 2016). While SFB was only beginning to refer clients onto job clubs, WFB already had established links where according to the manager CAP advisors found that “people weren't getting the support from job centres that they needed to get into work necessarily” and then provided a range of services “plugging that gap” in service provision:

*“so they started running job clubs where you would get help with your CV, they would get potential employers to come and do like mock interviews with people and you get like a one-to-one mentor through that [...], they hired suits for people, they took them to the hairdressers like they did anything they could to help that person to get a job you know”*  
(Manager, WFB)

The wide range of activities including ‘anything’ CAP could do to help their clients get a job is clearly beyond the scope of the food bank who are left to satisfy immediate material needs with a food parcel and then signpost people onto the job course as more long-term solution. Compared to the ‘Eat Well – Spend Less’ courses, intervention here not only has an

educational character but relies on material and human support by pastors facilitating restoration of employability. Yet, the sessions themselves target the same skills deficits and low 'confidence' with individual "support guidance and mentoring" trying to diagnose and optimise internal capacities and emotional states.

A promotional video produced by CAP features a series of client testimonies endorsing the transformative effects of the job club:

*J: "It's just overcoming that initial step to take that step and go along somewhere. They pointed me in directions, it gave me hope, it was saying look explore this, explore that. Where I was very limited and closed and said I've done this all my life, that's all I know. So Job Club opened it up for me and said hmm you can do all of these!"*

*D: "I think the job club is good in a number of ways, I think in terms of like the actual support that you got, the fact that you're there with people in a similar position to yourself, it made you feel as if you weren't alone as well as like time to concentrate things like writing your CV or interview skills."*

*K: "I found it really really encouraging, me seeing people who are also out of work, so we encouraged each other, it wasn't just the advisors, we encouraged each other".*

*D: "I'd recommend CAP job clubs for the friendships that they offer and for the specialist help that they offer. I think it's a brilliant balance of the two."*

*(CAP, 2014)*

In all these accounts, clients present their successful transformation as 'overcoming' of internal psychological barriers to employment at the level of subjectivity: With pastoral

guidance, J. became an active jobseeker open to flexibility and innovation with a changed attitude towards other jobs. Before the course, he was “very limited and closed” in his mentality but now exhibits positive affect with the right attitude required for the job market. For D., the social component was vital and facilitated behavioural change in relation to like-minded others where the setting allowed “time to concentrate” and bring out already present but underdeveloped capacities and skills. This shows how the course does not work simply through neoliberal imposition of an enterprising self but through technologies of community, friendship and peer support in a supportive space which at the same time obscures any power effects. For K. “it wasn’t just the advisors” but fellow clients who encouraged each other and took up an active role in mentoring and advising each other, so that desired practices and market-based rationalities as “specialist help” are translated by pastors (Waring & Martin, 2018) but then become realised and adopted as self-understandings through independent self-care. Once activated, clients themselves take up pastoral functions to act as conduits for translating and reproducing available norms of job readiness and marketable skills by passing them on to new members within the discourse community.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter directly challenges common assumptions about welcoming atmospheres within food banks (see chapter 2), demonstrating that the spatial arrangements and friendly interactions not only obscure existing social divisions but are themselves part of power strategies. As opposed to the disciplinary aspects of power encountered in chapter 5, in these confessional encounters between clients and volunteers, power is not coercive nor repressive but entices clients to give an account of their crisis, using their own freedom for the performative self-constitution as worthy recipients. Volunteers, meanwhile, took up a pastoral position of authority to hear confessions, diagnose crises and guide their ‘flock’ to salvation. Drawing on genealogies of confessional rituals, these diagnostic signposting practices were shown to take place in therapeutic spaces where knowledge is created, and power is exercised in the making of neoliberal subjects. Food banks become key institutions in these larger

therapeutic regimes by mediating and putting into practice behavioural problematisations of skills deficits, wrong attitudes and passive dependency to facilitate more long-term treatments beyond food aid. The targeting of internal capacities in clients' transformation into resilient subjects was shown to psychologise poverty together with expert partner agencies where subtle psychological modification is hidden among integrated service delivery combining practical skills training, cooking exercises and communal activities.

Job clubs and other MTF courses further rely on group-based interventions rather than individually targeted interventions, as the Trussell Trust has recognised that "peer learning is an important factor" (Trussell Trust, 2018d) for success. This has important consequences for power dynamics, pastoral relationships and the mediation of expertise in different settings where collective practices perform a key function of pastoral power, with 'clients' themselves internalising pastoral duties to guide others. Rather than a bilateral relationship between pastor and their 'sheep', these present socialised power relations in the production of neoliberal subjects where new "subjectivities are formed, regulated and perpetuated through a much more socialised realisation of the flow of power, involving not only the pastor but also the wider community of subjects" (Waring & Martin, 2018, p. 143).

Traditionally, neoliberal governmentality (Binkley, 2018) utilises individual freedom to optimise individuals' performance and market position by promoting autonomy, thereby isolating rational actors and reducing their dependency on collective (state) support and social memberships. In contrast, analysis of social spaces and collective programmes has revealed unexpected technologies of subjectification where "neoliberal rationalities do not operate alone" (Murray, 2016, p. 89) in the making of subjects, as community-oriented and paternalistic practices of 'feeding people' were shown to be running alongside typical neoliberal discourses of economic utility, resilience and individual job skills. As diverse places for socialisation and even fun and friendships, MTF programmes are adopting collective and relational practices of subjectification to promote self-management of risk factors and building individual capacities. The partial, non-linear and relational subjectification of clients

then escapes simple classifications as purely entrepreneurialised rational subjects, involving also collective practices of empowerment and translations of competing discourses and values of community, friendship and religious salvation by multiple pastors. Therefore, the different dynamics and inclusion of non-market-based rationalities and pastoral practices, which precede neoliberal rationalities, are potentially at odds with the static image of an isolated 'homo oeconomicus' (Brown, 2015) acting in a purely rational, economic self-interest. The following chapter emphasises this complexity and places findings in a larger context of neoliberal government where food aid and MTF programmes combine material and psychological interventions to manage poverty at a distance.



## **7 The biopolitics of food charity: Localisation, medicalisation and psychologisation**

Building on key insights from analysis of neighbourhood food collections (NFCs) and food bank practices so far, this chapter offers a theoretical contribution with a wider discussion of the dominant discourses and power dynamics present in food charity in the context of austerity and neoliberal government. Beginning with the added insights and limitations of pastoral power as analytical concept, I then turn to biopower to account for wider concerns with managing vital characteristics of clients as members of a population to be monitored, diagnosed and treated through expert interventions. Whereas existing research maintains a hypothesis of state retreat where food banks merely fill an existing gap, I will argue that the Big Society agenda and neoliberal localisms demand *more* government to promote market principles and organise social lives to re-integrate the poor into functioning, politically docile communities. By disentangling the emerging links between discourses of community, crisis and resilience, I am proposing that the biopolitics of food charity work through the localisation, medicalisation and psychologisation of poverty. Whereas localisation transfers responsibilities and creates new institutional networks for marketised service delivery, medicalisation will be shown to diagnose vulnerabilities, discipline clients and locate crises inside the individual before prescribing emergency food as initial treatment. Then, the explored signposting practices and behavioural interventions across More than Food (MTF) courses psychologise poverty in the therapeutic space of food banks to create fully resilient neoliberal subjects. In combining the critical potential of pastoral power and biopower as key concepts, the chapter avoids grand-sweeping generalisations about the workings of neoliberalism to encourage instead more situational analyses of the messiness and complexities of power (Pérez & Cannella, 2013) in localised regimes of neoliberal government.

## **From pastoral power to the biopolitics of food charity**

In previous chapters, food charity was shown to work through pastoral care for the poor where volunteers formed relationships with their ‘clients’ by monitoring and guiding their conduct while offering moral leadership and mediating expert knowledge across signposting practices. Feeding the poor proved to be not only a highly symbolic but a pastoral act and form of individualising power which sought to reintegrate stray ‘sheep’ into the community. Historically, pastoral power has been argued to form the background or prelude to modern governmentality and the emergence of the Western state founded on the production of inner truths through subjectification in self-examination and care for the self where “the modern government inherits from the Christian pastorate these individualising dynamics of dissecting the self, servitude, and a relation to truth within the self” (Carrette, 2013, p. 377). As individualising care in the name of wellbeing, it presents a “technology of governing” (Oksala, 2013, p. 328) by a few shepherds, requiring obedience and personal knowledge of the individual where the necessary normalisation of conduct to direct the ‘flock’ works through “continuous care and the compulsory extraction of knowledge rather than violent coercion and the delimitation of rights”. This is a key point which underscores the fallacy of the repressive hypothesis underlying campaigns for the Right to Food discussed in chapter 2: If power is still exercised through benevolent care and the production of individualised knowledge of clients, then a simple recourse to a rights-based discourse ignores these complex new power dynamics in the governmentalisation of hunger.

Frequent refusals by managers to make decisions over clients’ genuine status further point to a complex “economy of faults and merits” (Foucault, 2009c, p. 173) which the pastor may manage through oversight and personal interaction with his sheep but ultimately salvation remains “entirely in God’s hands”. Despite demanding “complete subordination” and authority (Foucault, 2009c, p. 174), pastors remain servants of their flock but do not pass judgement themselves. This might explain the managers’ positioning as non-judgmental givers and their refusal to give up even on otherwise hopeless clients who failed to turn their

lives around and kept returning to the food bank for help. Drawing on ancient texts on the Christian pastorate in one of his late lectures, Foucault (2009c, p. 168) shows that pastoral relationships are “fully and paradoxically distributive”, meaning that pastors must assure the salvation of each and all, that is as much of a single lost ‘sheep’ as much as the entire community as a whole. Even those who may seem unworthy of help must not be abandoned but returned to the ‘flock’, even though a single sheep “could compromise the whole” in a paradox where “the salvation of a single sheep calls for as much care from the pastor as does the whole flock” (Foucault, 2009c, p. 169). Foucault links this dilemma to another principle of “analytical responsibility” where Christian pastors themselves are to be held accountable for the number of missing sheep and “exhaustive and instantaneous transfer” occurs by transferring both faults and merits from the sheep onto the pastor as sources of their own joy or repentance as if they were their own. There is a dilemma here for the food bank, which, as a pastoral institution, does not have the necessary resources nor expertise to offer exclusive care for long-term needs and must instead refer clients to other expert services, at least temporarily entrusting their ‘flock’ to another shepherd.

Whereas Foucault (2009b, p. 143) outlined a history of the Christian pastorate where “there are never several shepherds for a flock; there is only one”, Waring and Latif (2017, p. 12) have shown how modern regimes of governmentality work through networks of multiple pastors and pastorates potentially in competition with one another in a “multi-positional or modal technique of pastoral power”. With potentially conflicting interests and operating in different spaces, these pastors are capable of developing different relationships with subjects and complement another’s expertise, as seen with the growing networks between food banks and advice agencies. Siisiäinen (2015, p. 241) too expands Foucault’s work by drawing on historic Christian texts by Augustine and Aquinas to show that there is no perfect seeing or total surveillance sought by pastors since “such preeminent power of sight belongs to God alone” so that no human pastor can “ever achieve an all-seeing surveillance and knowledge” of their flock. On the contrary, as Siisiäinen (2015) argues, true Christian faith requires an admission

of blindness and accepting invisibility and secrecy which remain part of God's plan whose mystery is not to be challenged. The referral and partnership between food banks and agencies then presents a possible fragmentation of surveillance where no single actor or institution seeks to hold complete knowledge of a subject but operates only within the frame of their own expertise and local reach. Indeed, experiences at SKFB had shown that interaction with clients was severely limited and even when visiting their homes, volunteers often failed to establish relationships due to stigma and shame. Along with the isolated examples of the manager at WFB resisting institutionalisation and refusing to work with the job centre and council, this shows how effects of discourses and pastoral technologies cannot be assumed since subjects are capable of evading interpellations (Clarke et al., 2007). A common dilemma of neoliberal governmentality is the reluctance about direct coercion, preferring instead to act upon subjects' capacity to act through their own free will without guarantees for success, presenting a constant danger for errors in how discourses are translated and put into practice (Rose & Miller, 2010). Analysis had indeed shown how the desire to know clients and guide their moral conduct was accompanied by careful and subtle nudging without giving advice or issuing instructions directly, just as food collections preserved donors' choices as an invitation to become responsible consumer-citizens.

Waring and Martin's (2018, p. 138) conception of pastoral networks has shown them to be "crucial nodes in neoliberalism who translate prevailing mentalities or discourses into specific life worlds" while also "deflecting resistance and maximising alignment between neoliberal discourse and the values and self-identity of the community". This could be seen in the ways managers and volunteers sought to reintegrate clients into the community, while promoting dominant norms of personal responsibility and economic independence. In chapter 4, NFCs were further shown to offer normative orientation for community membership based on market-based solutions which deflected from structural causes of poverty. However, Waring and Martin's (2018) conceptual framework is limited to discursive processes and gives no consideration to materiality and non-discursive elements in knowledge production and

mediation. Despite recognising more collective practices as “technologies of the collective” (Waring & Martin, 2018, p. 143), these remain underdeveloped and are perhaps better understood as technologies of the social in biopolitical regimes which “generate society as an imaginary totality and fictive collective body in the first place” (Lemke, 2011a, p. 175). What is still missing, therefore, is an account of how moral and political being is targeted at a population level and how vital characteristics of food poverty come to be targeted for collective optimisation of wellbeing and performance, rather than individual salvation. Despite the usefulness of pastoral power as a concept, shedding light on both the confessional rituals and individualising power inside food banks, exclusive concerns for individual subjection of clients miss out on social aspects of power and wider concerns for managing clients as problematic groups of a population. Here, biopower may provide a more suitable concept for explaining the added concern for vital aspects of life with interventions managing and changing entire bodies and minds for economic and political goals.

Biopower can be understood as the gradual extension of a new collectivising “pastoral power concerned with the regulation, and welfare of populations” (Smart, 2002, p. 106) in decentralised and fluid arrangements, whether it is through state institutions or charities. For Foucault (1978), biopower consists of both an individualising pole concerned with disciplining bodies and maximising their potential, and a collective pole concerned instead with regulating population as a living body. The identified pastoral practices fall under the former individualising pole, including identifying and separating clients for close inspection and confessions of crisis, making them diagnosable as patients. Despite still sharing the objective of “worldly achievements such as health, wealth and wellbeing, rather than posthumous salvation” (Martin & Waring, 2018, 7), pastoral power in a specific setting becomes biopolitical when aimed at population at larger scale in collaboration with other institutions. Its aim is health, economic utility and performance of population as a living body, not individual salvation from poverty. This modern form of biopower entails much wider “manipulations aimed at increasing probabilities for the flourishing of human life, including individual and

collective welfare” (Engels, 2015, p. 2) which included the wide array of MTF programmes targeting life skills and the promotion of healthy diets and responsible lifestyles. Biopower is therefore not limited to pastoral relationships but works through the management of life itself by making the ‘flock’ into measurable and predictable objects for intervention.

Foucault (Mendieta, 2014b, p. 44) further distinguishes this productive, normalising and de-centered biopower from previous forms of ‘juridico-discursive’ sovereign power of repression, prohibition and the law. In chapter 2, I argued that food poverty research to this day remains trapped within a negative understanding of power and hence cannot formulate solutions outside the liberal discourse of the law and a return to previous state welfare. The frequent endorsement of food banks as more caring spaces (see Cloke et al., 2017; Lambie-Mumford, 2017) idealises an ethics of care without recognising these features of pastoral power and further fails to see biopower as the collectivising force (Rose, 2001b) visible in empowerment and the promotion of community. Health research, shown to be mainly concerned with measuring food poverty and developing better intervention strategies, even becomes complicit in the biopolitical regime which targets the poor as problem populations. Although biopower is not necessarily evil (Engels, 2015), it always remains dangerous, as it disguises itself as inherently benevolent in promoting wellbeing, individualising risk and creating new spaces for regulating social life, seemingly detached from the stigmatising powers of state institutions. Beyond simply identifying food charity as a biopolitical instrument of neoliberal government, the following sections will draw together key insights from my analysis to explore *how* biopower operates through the localisation, medicalisation and psychologisation of poverty.

## **Localisation: Governing poverty at a distance**

### ***Big Society and new localisms***

Much of the existing literature on food poverty recognises how austerity transfers responsibilities from state welfare onto charitable food providers, absolving government from

political responsibility and even de-politicising poverty itself (Caraher & Furey, 2018; Poppendieck, 1998; Riches, 2018). However, these contributions also share a negative conception of power which fails to recognise the productive effects of food charities in ‘filling the gap’ and actively putting neoliberal discourses into practice. This limited reading of neoliberal austerity is exemplified by Garthwaite’s (2016b, p. 284) interpretation of the Big Society agenda “where the state retreats in uneven ways to the detriment of those most precariously positioned”. Lambie-Mumford (2013, p. 79) too stresses the importance of a “‘Big Society’ discourse” said to drive the move towards community activation through donations and volunteering. Dagdeviren, Donoghue, and Wearmouth (2018), too, understand ‘austerity localism’ as the roll-back of the state through ‘rhetoric’ of empowerment and shifting responsibility onto third-sector organisations where food banks are said to merely fill a ‘vacuum’ left by the state in a purely reactive fashion, leaving the poor disempowered with feelings of stigma and shame.

Williams et al. (2014) even locate food banks as ethical places of care within a ‘progressive localism’ promising localised resistance in the recording of usage data and client narratives which may be used to raise public awareness counter to austerity discourses. While the collection of client data was indeed among the reported benefits of being part of the Trussell franchise at WFB and LFB, this ignores how statistical evidence also becomes a marketing tool to drive further expansion, extend corporate partnerships and allows deflecting from accusations of unsustainability or other shortcomings. Uncritical endorsement of the statistical regime also ignores how referral reasons are discursively produced in the first place based on arbitrary distinctions of worthiness (see chapter 6) and how scientific knowledge becomes instrumental in measuring, categorising and thus inventing the poor as an object (Cruikshank, 1999) to be known and governed at a distance. What these authors are missing in their sole concerns for stigmatising forms of state power, therefore, is the significance of the *will to empower* as a neoliberal technology seeking to govern poverty at a distance:

*“Here power works by soliciting the active participation of the poor in dozens of programs on the local level, programs that aim at the transformation of the poor into self-sufficient, active, productive, and participatory citizens.” (Cruikshank, 1999, p. 69)*

The links to biopower become very apparent here in opening up local spaces, including food banks, for the management of health, education and welfare where “bio-power operates to invest the citizen with a set of goals and self-understandings, and gives the citizen-subject an investment in participating voluntarily in programs, projects and institutions set up to “help” them” (Cruikshank, 1999, p. 41). It is worth reiterating at this point that the effects of this local will to empower cannot be guaranteed and “subjects of doubt” (Clarke et al., 2007) may resist or only partially adopt discourses, as seen with WFB refusing to work with the local job centre and council. Martin and Waring (2018, 13) likewise remind us that “there is nothing predetermined or final about the influence of powerful governmental discourses on the constitution of subjectivities and the behaviour of subjects”. Situational analysis as a more grounded approach has proven especially useful in highlighting the complexities, contradictions and local materialisations of neoliberal discourses. The often-overlooked interventionist and social constructionist ethos in neoliberalism as a thought collective (Dean, 2011) invades all aspects of life and the normalising power of such ‘roll-out’ localism (Peck & Tickell, 2002) is neatly summed up below, re-emphasising the importance of resisting the hypothesis of state retreat which reduces food banks to a symptom of austerity:

*“[...] the changes that the Big Society intends to bring about do not imply less government but more management of people’s conduct as individuals and a population, through communities, neighbourhoods and indeed self-government. Under the vision of a Big Society we are not to be less governed, but more efficiently and effectively so, by governing our own conduct and that of those around us in our families, neighbourhoods and workplaces.” (Bulley & Sokhi-Bulley, 2013, p. 456)*



In chapter 4, a neighbourhood discourse was shown to construct NFCs as effective and community-based relief action for 'local' people in crisis. The outreach by an independent food bank in chapter 5 similarly revealed localised attempts to solve rural poverty through pastoral care and re-integration into community, as clients were hungry for both food and a sense of belonging. This often neglected geographical and material dimension of neoliberalisation as a social process rather than ideology (Peck & Tickell, 2002) creates new spaces of consumption and poverty management, which is easily overlooked when concentrating solely on a 'retreating' welfare state. Peck and Tickell (2002) here point to a long history of transformations within neoliberalism which constantly encounters and adapts to its own limits and crises. The productive features of such 'roll-out' neoliberalism include the extension of marketised rationalities towards nonmarket metrics and interventions in community, voluntary and faith-based organisations for neoliberal goals, including also "neopaternalist' modes of intervention" (Peck & Tickell, 2002, p. 390) as seen in the pastoral care, budgeting help, befriending and other support services seemingly at odds with creating isolated rational choice actors.

Moreover, neoliberalism operates through already existing institutions and networks, where pastoral practices and religious discourses were shown to pre-date, and sometimes be at odds with market-based interventions. In addition, neoliberalisation of space is driven by an interventionist agenda (Peck & Tickell, 2002) and constructivist ethos (Dean, 2011) which requires new institutions for the realisation of market principles in all areas of life. For Foucault, neoliberal government is intimately linked to the emergence of biopolitics with the task "to intervene on society as such, in its fabric and depth [...] so that competitive mechanisms can play a regulatory role at every moment and every point in society" in order to achieve "a general regulation of society by the market" (Foucault, 2008b, p. 145). Quantifications and celebrations of donated food as outputs at NFCs clearly followed this market logic, along with introducing competitive challenges between volunteers and driving further expansion and commodification of MTF services. In contrast, client case studies and

quotes used in support of the NFCs use powerful symbolic imagery of empty cupboards to construct a narrative of scarcity where clients only turn to food bank as a last resort, never as rational choice actors taking advantage of food offers. The social construction of scarcity in times of austerity (Williams, 2017a) was also visible in volunteers' positioning as safekeepers of food and responsible administrators overseeing its distribution.

The spatial features of food banks as welcoming spaces were further shown to promote desired social outcomes through creating a material choice architecture in the co-location of services and physical presence of advisors to maximise uptake and create more cost-effective and efficient service delivery. Such behaviourist designs and nudge mechanisms are key features of neoliberal social policies (Manzano, 2016) providing deliberation tools to inform individual decisions and change default 'anchors' to established behaviour, rather than more direct coercion into uptake of local services. The development and constant specialisation of services for complex, individual needs, rather than social and structural problems, follows the logic of a growing market in an 'economy of poverty' (Selke, 2017), clearly visible in the adopted language around service delivery, institutional growth and the 'rolling out' of profitable services to schools and other community institutions. Despite therapeutic claims of promoting wellbeing, such choice architectures target the lifestyles and bad behaviours of the poor through responsibilisation, thereby relocating social problems to "individual, family and neighbourhood levels" (Harrison & Sanders, 2016, p. 30) with increased scepticism towards dependency, identical to the rationalities of conditionality and limits to charitable giving examined in chapter 5. This is also where the 'new localism' (McKee, 2018, p. 114) of neoliberal government is working through the "discursive privileging of the expertise and capacities of local people to take responsibility for their own future welfare and wellbeing" in visible constructions of neighbourhood and problematisation of hunger with emphasis on helping 'local' people. By promising solutions to a broken society, chaotic lives and a failing distant welfare state, localised government works through mobilising community assets, encouraging active citizenship and producing new affective subjectivities (Burman, 2018; Campbell, 2010)

by maximising positive feelings of community membership, sense of accomplishment and defence of people's normality as consumers.

### ***Governing hunger through community***

Conservative values of “informal solidarity, local community and voluntarism” are central to the Big Society agenda (Romano, 2017, p. 51) but far from merely shifting responsibility and signalling a retreat of government, they require more intervention to ensure the translation of neoliberal discourse into local practice. Community here performs a key function in guiding behaviour at a distance (Rose, 2001a) where the shift to localism first introduced with ‘Third Way’ politics problematises poverty not as the unequal distribution of material resources but “a lack of belongingness and of the responsibility and duty to others generated through connection to the responsabilizing circuits of community”. This conservative ethos of idyllic communities was shown to be heavily romanticised where problematisations of failing societies and lost values eradicate local diversity and conflict in the fight against “UK hunger” in the ‘neighbourhood’. Presented as return to a natural order, these imagined communities do not allow for community activism as political activity but remain based on Christian and bourgeois values (Rose, 2001a) of restoring social norms and productivity. As demonstrated by political reactions to the 2011 riots as dangerous versions of ‘anti-community’ and collective resistance (Bulley, 2013), community as a technology of governing and controlling subjects relies on tensions and emergencies to respond to through technical administration of life and ‘empowering’ self-management.

In chapter 4, NFCs were indeed shown to offer membership to such an imagined community of givers, erasing difference and political struggle in new ethical places for the formation of neoliberal subjects. Volunteers are the idealised individuals of the Big Society (Bulley, 2013) who fully internalise the norms of resilient and responsible communities, as participation in NFCs invites us all to become active contributing members. Volunteers are dependent on the poor to position themselves within the community by exercising their power to define clients’ needs and the nature of their crisis when they construct them as ‘vulnerable’. They therefore

require clients' state of need to give a sense and purpose to their activities and attain their moral authority and standing within the community. In contrast, recipients or 'clients' were discursively formed as humble recipients, unable to cope with unexpected but natural crises and largely invisible, appearing only as hungry victims in need of saving. Whereas their subjection as absent poor makes them into distant but grateful recipients of food donations, the dispositive also enrolls them in their own reform through a neoliberal ethic of self-responsibility (Dean, 2007, p. 586) with typical clients shown as enterprising and actively seeking support in their recovery without ever developing material dependency. Without problematising a lack of income or other structural factors, the excluded themselves are targeted as problem populations lacking skills, competencies and personal resilience to cope with seemingly naturally occurring crises in individual lives, detached from causes and social meaning. Food charities thus present themselves as community institutions offering re-integration by re-moralisation and ethical reconstruction (Rose, 2001a, 2007) of clients as community members where a lack of material resources such as income is not problematised but poverty is instead located in a problematic lack of belonging, the absence of neighbourhood and duty to care for less fortunate members, all of which invite solutions through volunteering and donating. To be reintegrated into a 'virtuous' community of givers managing their own economic productivity requires their desire to work to be constantly performed, whereas material conditions, quantity and quality of food are not to be spoken of and any critique of factors outside the idealised space of the community is equally silenced. As paid work itself becomes the outcome and ultimate aim of recovery, it allows reattachment to a moral community bound together by "its psychological concomitants of identity, stability, commitment, and purpose" (Rose, 2001a, p. 13) as opposed to previous exclusion as isolated victim and non-member posing a threat of non-conformity to its moral norms and demands for economic utility. The refusal of ethical self-government is the same as refusing community and invites a range of moral and disciplinary sanctions with possible loss of entitlement to food aid and expulsion as unworthy poor from 'caring' spaces.

## **Medicalisation: Diagnosing vulnerabilities and governing through crisis**

Once food poverty has been localised to be governed at a distance as a matter for community and charity, individuals had to be diagnosed so their ‘underlying’ crisis could be treated more effectively. This section returns to the medical discourse and concept of crisis informing food bank practices in the referral and signposting regime, linking it to biopolitical strategies of risk management and the production of ‘clients’ as patients to be diagnosed, disciplined and ultimately transformed into healthy, economically useful and self-disciplined bodies.

Medicalisation forms a social and historical process (Clarke, Mamo, Fishman, Shim, & Fosket, 2003; Conrad, 2007) which extends medical jurisdiction, institutional reach and expert knowledge into new areas of social life, thereby transforming social problems into treatable conditions. With the expansion of statistics and the emergence of health sciences in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century, state power itself became ‘medicalised’ (Mendieta, 2014a) as sovereign power of the law made way for the biopolitical monitoring of divisions between the normal and abnormal. New scientific inventions allowed the measurements of birth rates, mortality, diseases and other demographic data necessary to regulate the productivity of a population according to norms. For the capitalist state, material bodies were not just resources to be exploited to create surplus value but living parts of a collective social body that requires constant examination and treatment. As a living body, social problems could now be diagnosed and problem populations targeted for intervention to restore productivity, with eugenics and ethnic cleansings as extreme examples of the new biopolitical age. In the new medical state, new expert authorities emerged to target social problems, identify deviancy and intervene to change bodies both at a material and psychological level. Around the same time, ‘crisis’ as a medical concept (Cordero, 2016) came to be gradually transferred from the ‘clinical gaze’ (Foucault, 1994) in medical settings to the social body in biopolitical interventions. Cordero (2016, p. 129) retraces the historic shift described by Foucault where medical knowledge and techniques were transferred onto society through the concept of crisis:

*“Crisis becomes the actual horizon of justification of a number of practices that seek to produce corrective and therapeutic effects when social processes are threatened by rupture, failure or illness, which, as a consequence, mobilize, produce and assert truth discourses that claim to possess a real force of cure.”*

For the exercise of biopower, crisis itself becomes a source of knowledge in the management of vital aspects of life through medical interventions promising therapeutic potential and return to normality. Crucially, the crisis discourse so prominent across food collection practices, signposting and MTF services forms a discursive event for the production of new truths about food poverty, its causes and required solutions. Crisis, as a tool of problematisation, brings forth the objects which are said to be in crisis, and thereby constitutes recovering subjects and prescribes necessary treatments with unquestionable authority. Client testimonies analysed in relation to NFCs in chapter 4 were replete with accounts of personal recovery and survival of individualised poverty, constructed as sudden onset of symptoms which required early detection, expert diagnosis and positive attitude to overcoming crisis. Dominant problematisations of sudden crises and outside factors beyond control in chapter 5 equally naturalised poverty as a natural phenomenon requiring preventative strategies and better risk management through proactive engagement on MTF courses.

Moreover, biopolitical risk and crisis management was also evident in existing research (Smith et al., 2018) making poverty research into a health science by identifying at-risk populations and measuring food insecurity rates to target interventions within society as a living body. Risk management forms an integral part of biopolitics (Fullagar, 2009) which links health outcomes to responsible lifestyles and practices of the self to constitute healthy subjects. The dominant concerns with encouraging healthier diets, necessary education and behaviour change among food bank users (Turnbull & Bhakta, 2016) here further demonstrate how medicalisation individualises poverty and renders bodies visible for an expert gaze demanding change at psychological level. Constructions of vulnerability, so prominent in studies funded

by the Trussell Trust into the profiles of ‘typical’ food bank users (see Loopstra & Lalor, 2017), form a subtle form of social control (Brown, 2016) in times of austerity by promoting paternalism and behaviourism which equate vulnerability with weakness and a lack of capacity for rational decision-making. Vulnerable subjects therefore require education, disciplining and moral intervention with pastoral authorities stepping in to assist the vulnerable and guide them to desired behaviours. Such vulnerability discourses work through a deficit-based model (Brown, 2016) which lends itself well to gift-based notions of welfare and neoliberal models of citizenship by problematising individual deficits compared to the norm of self-sufficient, active and capable citizens.

At all three food banks, volunteers were taking up pastoral positions of diagnosticians listening to clients’ stories in order to prescribe individual solutions through signposting where individual cases are assessed and the pastor “is essentially a doctor who has to take responsibility for each soul and for the sickness of each soul” (Foucault, 2009c, p. 174) tasked with diagnosing faults and deviant subjectivities. Internal rituals of referral, parcel composition and signposting were further shown as pastoral practices which made every client into a case to be assessed and managed to restore their job-readiness (Dean, 1995, p. 576). As a problematic lack of adaptive capacity and barrier to becoming a successful neoliberal subject (Chandler, 2016b), vulnerability still must be performed in determining entitlement to charitable help and pastoral authorities be convinced of genuine claims, as medicalisation holds clients in a subject position of vulnerability, thereby pathologising poverty as a diagnosable condition. The confessional dynamics explored in chapter 6 made food banks into medical spaces which combine specialist therapeutic services under a single roof for more effective treatment in collaboration with expert partners. As patients and sufferers of individual crises, clients first had to avow to being in crisis in order to be cured, while the disciplinary aspects of the pastoral regime were interlinked with the seriousness of their condition: Repeat visits and more long-term needs brought about a more intense gaze seeking to identify the nature of crisis inside the person where failures to conduct themselves as

obedient, responsible patients seeking redemption brought the risk of losing any entitlement altogether.

### ***Feeding bodies as initial treatment***

As I have argued, crisis is not the object but an instrument of neoliberal government offering new opportunities to optimise economic potentials, transform individual bodies said to be in crisis and make them fit for life inside market economies. However, before clients could be transformed through treatment for their ‘underlying’ problems, emergency food parcels and personal hygiene products proved vital for offering temporary relief, building relationships and preparing clients for engaging with additional services. Medical interventions by this “pastoral apparatus” (Hook, 2003, p. 617) are guided by altruism and claimed benefits for health and well-being where authorities acting as intermediaries require intimate personal knowledge of habits, lifestyle, financial circumstances and family situations which are recorded and translated into statistical data on the Trussell Trust system. As Mendieta (2014a, p. 39) explains, this expansion of medical expertise and techniques into the social sphere is at the centre of biopolitics and its “medicalization of individual and collective bodies for the sake of maximising their output” within capitalist economies. In a lecture on the birth of social medicine which clearly shows the influence of Marx on his thought, Foucault described the capitalist transformation of the human body not just into a source of labour but an object requiring constant monitoring, regulation and optimisation:

*“Society’s control over individuals was accomplished not only through consciousness or ideology but also in the body and with the body. For capitalist society, it was biopolitics, the biological, the somatic, the corporal that mattered more than anything else. The body is a biopolitical reality; medicine is a biopolitical strategy.” (Foucault, 2002d, p. 137)*

In chapter 4, clients frequently performed their willingness to return to paid work and once again become functioning members of the labour force and useful members of the community whose vitality had been restored. Food poverty, as new phenomenon to be measured,



diagnosed and treated thus becomes a treatable condition requiring individual risk management and collective strategies of prevention. The latter was clearly visible in NFCs where constructing self-helping communities and increased charitable giving were visualised as preventative factors to help build “stronger neighbourhoods”. Here, ‘feeding’ the poor equally promises immediate results and a solution to sudden crises, leaving untouched any structural and historic determinants of poverty. Biopolitical treatment protocols were further evident in the professional signposting regime and its therapeutic function in restoring clients’ individual performance and economic utility. Biopolitics works through nurturing the body as a machine (Mendieta, 2014a), maximising both its productivity but also its political docility. As clients are restored to economic, and hence medical, fitness, they owe their recovery to the food bank and it is this emotional debt which requires them to discipline themselves and monitor their own spending habits and lifestyle to avoid a relapse into poverty. Biopolitical interventions, as seen with the range of MTF courses, make the body into a “privileged site of experiments with individuality” (Rose, 2001b, p. 18) learning and trying out a new range of techniques related to diet, exercise and financial wellbeing. Overarching concerns with healthy diets and learning survival strategies across the ‘Eat Well – Spend Less’ course demonstrate how clients’ bodies become sites for corrective treatments, supervised self-management and the minimisation of risk.

## **Psychologisation: The making of resilient subjects**

Once bodies have been fed and prepared for further treatment, psychologisation forms the final stage in the biopolitics of food charity where fully psychologised explanations and solutions to poverty are applied in behavioural interventions. De Vos (2012, p. 1) defines psychologisation as a process of “psychological vocabulary and psychological explanatory schemes entering fields which are supposed not to belong to the traditional theoretical and practical terrains of psychology”. Documenting the expansion and colonisation of social and cultural spheres on a global scale, de Vos (2012, p. 96) understands the key role of psychology as “prime discipline realising biopolitics” by mediating psychological knowledge and guiding

subjectification. The following section will explore in more depth how food charity works not only through material feeding of bodies but also the psychological transformation into resilient subjects able to bounce back from crisis. Key findings from chapter 6 will be placed in a larger context in which the cultural expansion of psychological truths (Williams, 2017b) of poverty ignores power interests along with the socio-political conditions of truth production itself, thereby reducing complex and relational processes of becoming subjects to simple psychological facts of being ‘vulnerable’ and requiring therapeutic intervention.

### ***Psychopolitics, therapeutic domination and the biohuman***

Biopower works through the extraction of deep personal truths and “cannot be exercised without knowing the inside of people’s minds, without exploring their souls, without making them reveal their innermost secrets” as “it implies a knowledge of the conscience and an ability to direct it” (Foucault, 2002e, p. 333). Extending Foucault’s work on biopolitics, Han (2017, p. 25) argues that with neoliberalism positive or ‘smart’ power “has discovered the psyche as productive form” where it is predominantly concerned with optimising psychic processes and internal resources to produce economically useful subjects. However, disciplinary power is too easily dismissed as outdated by Han (2017, pp. 35–36) who wrongly writes off any “disciplinary coercion” in neoliberalism, since my own findings show subjects of food charity as both disciplined but also as actively involved in their own constitution as resilient survivors of poverty. In chapter 5, discipline was shown to remain a crucial element in the pastoral regime of food banks where positive techniques alone proved insufficient given the problematisation of ‘unworthy’ clients lacking motivation and self-discipline to even engage with advice services. Here, ‘negative’ aspects of power remained in imposing limits and making food parcels conditional on participation in other programmes with Han’s (2017) ‘seduction’ by psychopolitics proving insufficient in enrolling clients in their reform without disciplinary mechanisms, paternalistic oversight, re-moralisation and the visible threat of losing entitlement to food aid.

Whereas de Vos (2012) suggests a similar move toward ‘psycho-biopolitics’ as Han (2017) to fill the theoretical gap left in Foucault’s conception of biopower, I suggest that biopower is still a useful concept if *bios* is understood as both material and psychic life which then includes new modes of subjectivation. While pastoral power still maintains a static liberal conception of the subject, McFalls and Pandolfi (2014, p. 177) convincingly show how post-liberalism has swept “away the liberal subject of rights” and state welfare to produce a new ‘biohuman’ (Dillon & Reid, 2009) as a flexible subject of adjustable potentialities constantly requiring evaluation, treatment and continual improvement in the name of wellbeing. The biohuman of biopolitics is therefore incompatible with the rights-based discourse of the Right to Food (see chapter 2) which no longer acts on individual rights and legal subjects (Lemke, 2015). As I have attempted to demonstrate, a humanist discourse driving rights-based analysis maintains a static and natural object of the citizen, who is in fact “an entity that is continually challenged and reshaped by these and other governmental-ethical practices” (Dean, 1995, p. 581). Rather than rule over a universal subject through laws, neoliberal government has become fully therapeutic (McFalls & Pandolfi, 2014, p. 183) through expansion of norms and the “expert application of an instrumentally rational technical procedure, typically a treatment protocol, to a subordinated individual or population in a situation of emergency, crisis or disease, always to the supposed benefit of the treated”. The examined crisis management and expert treatment deployed by food banks presents a form of therapeutic domination or ‘therapeusis’ (McFalls & Pandolfi, 2014) in the expansion of biopolitical strategies through pastoral care claiming absolute benevolence as more friendly type of power (Han, 2017).

These social therapeutics of post-liberal government (Cordero, 2016) work through crisis as both technology of power in the regulation and optimisation of living beings, and a discursive mechanism through which new truths about poverty can be formulated. Rather than withdrawing from therapeutic spaces in the community, neoliberalism is characterised by this therapeutic mode of government, its turn to character (Gill & Orgad, 2018) and promotion of psychological explanations (Madsen, 2014; Vos, 2012) for structural and societal problems.

There was a clear influence of positive psychology and psycho-compulsion (Friedli & Stearn, 2015; Thomas, 2016) on MTF programmes in chapter 6 which sought to promote positive feelings and attitude towards job-seeking and learning new skills as orientation for a constructive way out of poverty, while exorcising any negative feelings, resentment or anger for being in poverty. Indeed, MTF courses were shown to require clients to exhibit a positive outlook on life and required openness to personal change and economic recovery. Although problematisations of personal deficits and chaotic lives provided the vital rationale for behavioural intervention, the key aim here is the cultivation of clients' skills in 'fun' activities and cooking courses rather than punishment or condemnation of personal failings by instilling confidence and right attitudes as earmarks of positive psychology separating the individual from social relations (Binkley, 2011). Neoliberal governmentalisation of affect (Campbell, 2010) means that thinking about one's choices and capacities differently requires *feeling* differently and successfully converting the self into an active subject controlling its own affective potential. Here, positive psychology utilises spaces of everyday life (Binkley, 2011) rather than professional therapeutic treatment regimes, as volunteers testified to the therapeutic benefits of the food bank space.

The confessional rituals and guided activities within the food bank encourage constant self-monitoring of spending habits, dietary choices and shopping behaviour and require clients to self-examine their inner qualities in the promotion of confidence and positive attitude whereby "inhibitions, points of weakness and mistakes are to be therapeutically eliminated in order to enhance efficiency and performance" (Han, 2017, p. 29). A medicalised discourse of healing poverty was guided by positive psychology in identifying vulnerabilities, while any negative thoughts and expressions of anger were notably absent from clients' testimonies across the instrumentalised case studies. Overcoming poverty here requires positive attitude and developing a productive relationship to the self, not the social environment, as holding on to negative emotions might lead to resistance and political organisation together with others suffering the same violence. Gill (2017, p. 618), reflecting on the therapeutic turn to character

in self-help cultures, summarises very well how psychologisation locates problems and solutions inside the individual, leaving institutional power and social inequalities untouched:

*“Crucially, the focus on addressing social injustice by focussing on personal qualities like confidence or resilience is that is not disruptive: the small, manageable, psychological tweaks – practicing gratitude, ‘reprogramming’ negative thoughts – are capitalism, neoliberalism and patriarchy-friendly.”*

The creation of welcoming and social spaces was crucial here, as pastoral practices were shown as non-intrusive and respecting clients’ dignity in promoting new relationships and local support networks through more collective subjectification using distinctly non-neoliberal technologies of friendship, fun and neighbourly care. Biopedagogic practices (Harwood, 2009) of teaching vital life skills therefore draw on both market and non-market rationalities where clients’ exercise of freedom was retained and even required in the self-realisation with others through a ‘friendly’ or smart power that “seeks to call forth positive emotions and exploit them” (Han, 2017, p. 14) across new job clubs and communal activities. At the same time, problematised cognitive deficits in clients meant that overcoming poverty became a matter of acquiring and enacting a self-knowledge of responsible citizen-consumers making informed choices about personal credit, healthy diets and lifestyles. As clients are expected to perform a positive self, rebuild their confidence and become empowered subjects, medicalised and sanitised case studies as tales of recovery and salvation required the disavowal of an old self (Butler, 2016) and with it any negative feelings of insecurity, resentment, anger or desire for change outside the body.

### ***Governing food poverty through resilience***

This final section now turns to the resilience discourse so prominent across previous chapters which celebrated clients bouncing back from poverty by restoring their independence and becoming functioning consumers again. A lack of ‘bounce-backability’ was problematised by managers in the ‘chaotic’ lives and wrong choices of clients, their unwillingness to seek expert

advice and their development of long-term dependency on emergency food without resolving their ‘underlying’ problems. The MTF programme and its advocated turn to “developmental aid” in food charity (Tulloch et al., 2018) make explicit references to resilience with interventions promising protection from future emergencies, effectively turning diagnosed vulnerabilities into potentials for optimisation. On the ‘Eat Well – Spend Less” course and job clubs, clients were expected and encouraged to adapt to crises by building internal capacities and learning new skills, including budget recipes, finance skills and other life skills necessary to cope with poverty. Such resilience discourses create adaptive and self-reliant subjects (Davoudi, 2018; Reid, 2018) who actively adjust and self-manage their crises, as fatalistic problematisations of structural factors outside of people’s control were shown to reinforce the need to adapt to a chaotic and risky world. For Reid (2018, p. 646), the political stake in the resilience discourse is this denial of agency to change a ‘disastrous’ world, where enduring the disaster is now a requirement for subjects tasked with prospering in a world of constant risk and uncertainty.

Resilience replaces political capacities with adaptive ones and demands better choice-making, thereby removing the external world (Chandler, 2016a) and denying any agency in transforming it. Such a post-liberal therapeutic world signals the end of politics (McFalls & Pandolfi, 2014, p. 183) where “there is no future, there are no politics, only an eternal present in which the veridiction of the market, finally freed from the jurisdiction of the state, leaves the post-liberal biohuman at the mercy of all market-tried-and-true technologies of the self”. The dominance of resilience thinking highlights the democratic deficit in therapeutic government (McFalls & Pandolfi, 2014) where cost-effective immediate remedies offered by charity outweigh any long-term concerns or time-consuming debates over sustainability or social inequality. ‘Emergency food’ promises exactly this professional treatment of crisis and its effects were immediately visible in spectacular celebrations of generosity and community at NFCs and clients’ narratives testifying to the life-changing impact in times of desperation. Donors were assured that their contributions to the market of food charity were far more effective than any political solutions, as the spectacle of commodified poverty relief also

offered the added bonus of instant emotional gratification and being a useful community member.

In contrast, questions surrounding political responsibility and even culpability are rendered counter-productive as “post-liberal therapeutic domination effectively reduces politics to the technical management of an endless series of catastrophes, real, impending, or imagined” (McFalls & Pandolfi, 2014, p. 184): Charitable emergency responses are hence inoculated against critique through their claims of benevolence, offering fun and immediate help in addition to providing hope and community which no good citizen could ever deny. Contesting them would be to deny kind help and returning subjects to a state of crisis, as any alternatives to their therapeutic regime have been rendered absent in the context of broken societies and a failing welfare state. Indeed, refusing therapy could itself be interpreted as a sign of pathology and justify further examination and therapeutic intervention (McFalls & Pandolfi, 2014). For clients, meanwhile, the focus on a therapeutic present avoids looking back at the origins of trauma, channelling that energy inwards toward present optimisation as protection from unknowable crises and the shocks of austerity yet to come. The powerful metaphor of ‘bouncing back’ from crisis behind the resilience discourse (Gill & Orgad, 2018) emphasises the return to a natural pre-crisis state, as food banks were shown to celebrate individual survival of austerity and personal transformation rather than scandalise causes of pain. For Dean (2011), the turn to resilience in neoliberal societies is now less about promoting wealth-producing markets but the preparation and enforced adaptation of individuals and communities for future unknown and unpredictable catastrophes. The certainty of future crises and inevitability of poverty were never questioned by staff who constructed austerity as natural disaster requiring better individual coping strategies and preparedness through building community and learning survival strategies under the food bank’s guidance. Problematisations of a ‘broken society’ and lost values of community and neighbourly care in chapter 5 further demand resilience where “in line with conservative values, accepting, adapting to and maintaining the status quo is prioritised over the transformative opportunities that are inherent in complex lives” (Davoudi, 2018, p. 165).

Recent genealogies of resilience (Davoudi, 2018; Walker & Cooper, 2011) have highlighted its origins in ecological systems theory along with strong influences of the market philosophy by Friedrich Hayek as a complex ecological system for crisis response and management of uncertainty. These valuable contributions reveal the origins of the resilience discourse in a neoliberal doctrine which naturalises crisis as unexpected and unknowable by nature, thereby reinforcing the need of systems and individuals to adapt and absorb any shocks. Resilience thinking makes complexities and risks into something to be managed in their effects through localised crisis management without the possibility of planned prevention or structural intervention in the system itself. Uncertainty and defined risks therefore require constant individual adaptation to future crises, rather than worldly intervention to change external conditions producing crises. Such resilience thinking was clearly visible in the ways a failing welfare state and a risky world of austerity were problematised as outside of control, demanding instead individual adaptation and controlling one's own life risks by taking up advice services. Resilience as psychological project was implicitly embraced by all food banks in the study and reflected in dominant problematisations of inevitable future shocks. As Bulley (2013, p. 273) shows, the political stake in governing social problems through resilience is "the creation of community oriented, productive individuals and locales which can efficiently return to work after a catastrophe and minimise economic loss". Thus, by capitalising on sudden emergencies, food charity works not to change the conditions of austerity but actively transforms the subjects suffering its effects. Its prescribed biopolitical interventions may vary depending on the diagnosed vulnerabilities but always entail a necessary combination of building awareness of inner strengths and weaknesses, followed by learning, adaptation and recovery (Joseph, 2018) in line with neoliberal agendas.

There is a crucial link here between resilience discourses and biopolitics with Reid (2018, p. 649) pointing to ecological origins of resilience and its applications to living systems: Resilience has become "a capacity of life itself" located within living, adapting bodies who become the target of biopolitics, as resilience itself forms an infinite property of populations



and resource to be nourished at subjective level as measure of people's fitness. As part of one's character that is modifiable, resilience then performs a key function in the biopolitical regulation of risk and social deviance (Amery, 2018) through responsabilisation while disguising the origins of suffering. In turn, resilience as an innate capacity (Davoudi, 2018) of biohumans is threatened wherever subjects are exposed to too much state welfare, as individuals and communities are claimed to develop dependency and lose the ability to actively adapt to crises as opportunities for fostering their internal capacities. Problematisations of hunger in chapter 4 completely avoided questions of culpability and political responsibility for *causing* crises, as the resilient subject does not question the reasons for suffering (Reid, 2018, p. 651) but embraces opportunity for optimisation and "adapts to rather than resists the conditions of its suffering in the world". In the examined pastoral networks, resilient food bank clients no longer sought external state assistance but were made to look inwards and recognise the need to exercise their entrepreneurial capacities to ensure their own security by seeking advice, optimising their financial resources and learning new job skills. The entire rationale behind the signposting and advice regime lies in optimising individual security with the recent shift from security to resilience in development (Reid, 2018) also visible in welfare systems where resilience of the poor becomes a key policy goal, achievable through transformation into neoliberal subjects whose fitness is measured by their ability to return from crisis to productivity without developing material dependency.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter began with a challenge to well-established assumptions about food charities simply responding to a retreating welfare state by arguing that neoliberal government requires *more* government to induce desired behaviours and establish new markets. Working through discourses of empowerment and community, food charity was shown to demand more intervention and active participation by responsible citizens through volunteering, donating and becoming members of self-managing communities. Processes of localisation blur the boundaries between state and community institutions, as power is exercised not merely in

shaming and stigmatising the poor but also within legacies of pastoral power in ancient Christian practices of confession and the persistence of discipline and surveillance. Once localised as a matter for charitable interventions, food charity operates through a diagnostic regime in close partnership with advice agencies to detect crises in individuals and prescribe medicalised treatments. These individual crises become opportunities to bind deviant subjects to the biopolitical regime through initial feeding of bodies as emergency treatment, followed by therapeutic intervention in centralised hubs for crisis treatment to remake their psyche into a shock-resistant one. Rather than address structural causes, the therapeutic regime emphasises prevention as the number of repeat-visits makes interventions measurable and optimisable. MTF services seek to build clients' individual capacities and optimise their wellbeing through 'income maximisation' services (Tulloch et al., 2018, p. 2) and behavioural modification to avoid future debts and other risky behaviour, showing the biopedagogic character in teaching necessary life skills, confidence and right attitude to self-manage hardships and build inner strengths to better cope with future crises deemed outside of control. Biomedicalisation as a historical process (Clarke et al., 2003) was shown to work through a resilience discourse which denies any control over the external world while demanding transformation of an inner nature and psychological qualities. The compulsion to monitor and optimise financial and bodily health based on diagnosed vulnerabilities thereby leads to further specialisation and expansion of commodified MTF services which work through individual treatment rather than universal rights.

If "biopolitics is the name for a new way of producing political effects through new forms of power-knowledge and corresponding *dispositifs* (apparatuses)" (Mendieta, 2014a, p. 37) and "to govern is to structure the possible field of action of others" (Foucault, 2002e, p. 341), then food charity is one such dispositive through which biopower is generated and now circulates in the government of food poverty as a diagnosable condition. Rather than merely filling a gap left by the state, this dispositive produces medicalised subjectivities and new knowledge of crises, imposing limits on possible ways of thinking about the problem and imagining

solutions. After creating the economic conditions for individual crises through austerity, neoliberal capitalism constructs these new markets for localised poverty management, as charitable food aid becomes another commodity offering financial and symbolic benefits to businesses and moral absolution with positive affect to donors (see chapter 4).

Here, food banks find themselves in a possible dilemma where by responding to the catastrophes of austerity, they become integral parts of localised treatment regimes which produce resilient, disciplined subjects better equipped to survive future shocks. The problem is not, as often claimed, that food banks deflect from the underlying problems and thus depoliticise poverty – on the contrary, it is the active targeting and therapeutic intervention in clients' personal and psychic lives which forms a biopolitical solution in itself. Instead of looking for a more authentic reality of poverty behind this psychologisation (Vos, 2012) by discovering people's actual needs, the political task here lies in challenging how reality itself is produced by these medical discourses and the terms and explanations offered by them. Such re-problematisation may provide a starting point for resistance by revealing the costs in becoming a neoliberal subject no longer able to change external conditions but constantly adapting to a risky world.

## **8 Concluding reflections**

### **Key findings and contributions**

This final chapter offers concluding reflections on key findings, original contributions and limitations of the study. Employing an innovative approach which combined critical discourse and dispositive analysis with situational analysis, three research questions have guided this study into (1) problematising activities and power effects by food charities, (2) production of visibility and normality at collection events and (3) implications for subjectivity, which all turned out to be closely interlinked and cannot be summarised here separately. Instead, I would like to highlight original contributions in selected key areas:

#### **Understanding the links between food charity and neoliberal government**

By bringing a constructionist and critical discursive approach to an area of research dominated by realist empiricism and positivistic concerns for causation, this study challenges limited understandings of food charity as symptomatic responses to austerity and state retreat. Far from merely responding to a natural phenomenon, food banks actively localise, medicalise and psychologise poverty as a preventable and manageable condition to be adapted to under expert guidance. Implementing market principles, but also competing communitarian discourses and conservative values, food banks are complex and contested sites where knowledge is produced and power is exercised. By conceptualising food charity as a dispositive, this study highlights its strategic and productive function in normalising charitable solutions and creating new subjectivities and spaces for commodified poverty relief. By imposing a referral system and parcel limits, food banks adopt dominant rationalities of conditionality and personal independence from the formal welfare system where ‘clients’ are constantly evaluated and disciplined into taking up advice services without developing material dependency. Yet, the refusal to cooperate with the local council and job centre by one manager also showed some potential for resisting institutionalisation.

### **New insights into power relationships and subjectivity in food bank settings**

Showing categories of grateful ‘clients’ and helpful volunteers to be products of discursive processes, this study emphasises the performative and situational nature of subjectification in local contexts. By caring for their ‘flock’, volunteers remain in a pastoral position of moral authority, presiding over food gifts, deciding entitlements, defining clients’ needs and guiding their conduct. Clients as grateful recipients and survivors of austerity are fixed in positions of vulnerability and crisis, expected to maximise their potentials through active work on the self without questioning pastoral authority or the origins of their suffering. Pastoral power here explains both expressions of love and ethical care for clients but also disciplinary aspects and conditionality of charity. Volunteers act as mediators who translate available discourses into practice in pastoral networks with other agencies who complement their expertise and allow outsourcing of responsibilities. Formation of subjects was shown as partial and non-linear, with some signs of managers actively negotiating and resisting their positions as enforcers of neoliberal rationalities. Whereas popular calls for a Right to Food maintain a humanist conception of a static legal subject, the biopolitics of food charity were shown to produce a new biohuman of adjustable potentialities condemned to constant optimisation, education and moralisation through customised and marketable interventions.

### **A critique of psychologisation across ‘More than Food’ services**

So far either neglected or uncritically endorsed in existing research, MTF courses were shown to psychologise poverty by problematising skills deficits, lack of positive affect and bad decision making in a larger biopolitical treatment regime. In the therapeutic space of food banks, ‘clients’ are initially treated through ‘emergency food’ in preparation for behavioural interventions as long-term solution. Drawing on the historical context of medicalisation as a social process, ‘Eat Well – Spend Less’ courses and job clubs were shown to work through discourses of crisis and resilience in a preventative strategy to maximise internal capacities, promote responsible lifestyles, financial self-control and the ability to ‘bounce back’ from seemingly inevitable future shocks. Demanding constant self-monitoring and self-work, these

behavioural interventions pathologise poverty without stigmatising it or using direct coercion by instead offering collective interaction, friendly spaces and fun activities. Rather than a change in structural conditions or existing inequalities, MTF courses promise to cure the poor by returning them to the normality of economic performance and financial health and thereby become instruments of social control. Psychological expertise mediated and implemented by pastoral agents in community spaces thus becomes a barrier to social and political change.

### **An original contribution examining national food collection events**

As the first study into Neighbourhood Food Collections, dispositive analysis provided new insights into the discursive and material infrastructure of food charity which exercises its normalising power by shaping and limiting conditions of possibilities for seeing and acting upon poverty in everyday situations. By problematising hunger as natural phenomenon rather outcome of structural inequalities, the events make visible appeals to community, generosity and feeding the needy to maximise positive affect and offer instant emotional gratification as more effective solution compared to a failing welfare system. Materialisations of neoliberal localism distinguish the local poor as community members from distant strangers while keeping them at a comfortable distance. By shopping for a distant Other, donors are enrolled in a spectacle of ethical consumption where symbolic donations of any cheap food items become truthful contributions to solving hunger without reference to its causes. As collection points become places for celebrating an ethos of volunteering and philanthropy, poverty relief becomes commodified with significant symbolic and economic benefits to supermarkets.

### **Methodological innovation**

This thesis adds to recent debates and developments in discourse analysis beyond the field of psychology by introducing Siegfried Jäger's contributions in KDA which offer new understandings of the relationships between discourse, materiality and social change in Foucault's tradition. The turn towards dispositive analysis avoided recourse to textual empiricism in recognition of the productive features of non-discursive practices and

materialisations of knowledge. An openness for non-textual data sources required a flexible and study-specific approach where visual data, videos and documents became crucial resources for reconstructing knowledge invested in charity practices. Situational analysis provided a flexible toolkit of mapping techniques and elements from grounded theory which can enrich discourse research with a sensitivity for local complexities, the active role of the non-human and relational subjectification beyond static subject positions. The ‘messiness’ of food banks as complex social worlds here needed unpicking, revealing distinctly non-neoliberal technologies in pastoral practices and religious rituals where traditional approaches in governmentality studies reduce complexity by relying on simple generalisations and master categories. Below, I will reflect further on the added benefits of adopting MAXQDA software for situational analysis.

### **Future research**

It is common for studies of food poverty to conclude by demanding more rigorous evidence collection, improved measurement and collection of client narratives to raise awareness and inform social policy. However, having problematised this naïve empiricism as on-going specialisation and purposive accumulation of discursive capital, I would encourage more critical and independent research into food charity as a power-knowledge regime. An existing gap for critical contributions exists in the work of referral agents and their interactions with clients, including power relationships and decision processes over ‘genuine’ claims to food aid. Likewise, the work of partners such as Christians Against Poverty (CAP) deserves much more scrutiny where ‘job clubs’ and debt counselling services remain unexplored. Whereas this study focused on NFCs at Tesco stores across the UK, new corporate partnerships with Asda and other retailers warrant further study into potential benefits to businesses, new dependencies and the on-going institutionalisation of corporate food aid. Finally, the decolonisation of poverty research will require an openness for approaches led by those directly affected by the impacts of austerity and future studies might explore how the discourses identified in this study are negotiated and possibly resisted by food bank users.

## **Methodological reflections and limitations**

Given the problematic application of scientific concepts of reliability and validity in constructionist research, Wood and Kroger (2000) propose an alternative understanding of validity as warrantability in the extent to which analysis is both trustworthy and sound. Similarly, Bührmann and Schneider (2008) stress the importance of making the research process in discourse and dispositive analysis visible through extensive descriptions of the methods of data collection and analysis, along with a discussion of encountered problems and decision-making. My analysis therefore seeks to be persuasive rather than provide a final truth (Rose, 2016, p. 216) based on rigorous empirical analysis and transparent accounts of the research process. In chapter 3, I have outlined detailed steps of analysis, while extensive use of quotations and visual examples throughout serve to demonstrate soundness of analysis by showing that my arguments and interpretations are grounded in the data. The use of MAXQDA provided me with another layer of transparency and quality control where I adapted proposed steps in SA for the software which can then be followed by readers. Using lexical searches, coding queries and document portraits in MAXQDA further allowed me to check coding density and identify previously uncoded segments of interviews, while iterative rounds of coding, close memoing and constant comparison added additional rigour to analysis. The abductive reasoning in SA made me constantly move back and forth between data and theory, making sure that all my claims were supported by evidence.

Adopting the dispositive model in my research design has fundamentally shaped the style and narrative of this study where my reconstructions and necessarily partial descriptions of discourse fragments remain an interpretative effort (Keller, 2013) in my choices and ways I brought together different types of data. With the NFCs, I decided to focus on questions of visibility and normalisation and consequently built a visual corpus, whereas interviews with shoppers or supermarket staff would have allowed exploring their self-positioning and ‘actual’ subjectification in more depth. Conversely, the focus on visual analysis has highlighted the value of including visual data in dispositive analysis (Moeller, 2019) offering added insight



into the interplay between non-discursive practices and material elements in the production of normality in spaces of everyday life. After initial difficulties in accessing food banks, limiting my data collection to a small number of expert interviews also meant that I did not explore volunteers' experiences and possible deviation from dominant practices in depth. Although comparisons between one independent and two Trussell Trust food banks were insightful and highlighted many commonalities in applying conditionality and treatment protocols, situational analysis emphasises the partiality and temporality of situated knowledge: Rather than generalise from emerging findings, I propose a more modest transferability (Bryman, 2012) to inspire more locally specific analyses of the workings of power in what are complex, contested and constantly changing spaces.

Situational analysis has been fruitful in driving relational and comparative analysis of the power dynamics across different sites and added rigour to the analysis by forcing me to explore connections and variation between different data types. Whereas relational and social arena maps turned out to be key drivers for analysis, positional maps proved of little value, since there were no contested positions on single issues evident in the data. Although silences undoubtedly remain important in the analysis of power, positional maps appear to simplify notions of resistance while ignoring how giving voice also means making subjects give an account of themselves within a specific scene of address and wider discursive climate (Butler, 2016) with expectations for obtaining useful knowledge. Wendy Brown (2009, p. 86) has criticised such notions of "compulsory discursivity" equating 'voice' with freedom which fails to confront "the regulatory potential in speaking ourselves, its capacity to bind rather than emancipate us", as silences can also serve as a 'shelter' from power and regimes which demand compulsory extraction of truth in the formation of subjects. Taking a similar decolonising approach, Bhattacharya (2009, p. 114) warns that "giving voice to the unvoiced leaves him/her open to being served up as an exotic dish to be consumed or to being viewed as one would view a performing animal in the zoo". It was this ethnographic fascination with the poor Other in existing food bank research which led me to take an interest in discourses and performative

subjectivation, not documenting the experiences of the poor. My decision not to interview ‘clients’ stemmed from precisely this refusal to make them into objects of scientific study which does nothing to improve social and material conditions (Smith, 1999). Although this may leave unanswered questions about *actual* subjectification (Bührmann, 2012) and experience, my aim was to problematise these confessional dynamics of avowal and compulsory speech within the therapeutic regime. People’s refusal to speak, whether to researchers or food bank staff, may produce silences as a possible source of resistance to the individualising power inherent in these spaces and should be respected and protected.

Finally, I have found that the different techniques in SA do not adequately map the temporal aspects of discourses and, following Jäger’s (2015) definition, do not fully account for their dynamic life as flows of knowledge through time and space. This may be a more general limitation of maps but, especially given the evolvment of the NFCs across the three time points, I had wished for a way to visualise changes beyond comparing different versions of maps. Although ordered maps demand an account of temporal elements, SA does not seem suited for producing a full genealogical account of where discourses have originated from, or how they have changed over time. Consequently, there remains a need to historicise situations again, as I have attempted by drawing on genealogies of Christian pastoral rituals in chapters 5 and 6. Rather than a fundamental flaw, these limitations point to unexplored potentials in situational analysis and should invite further methodological experimentation and reflection.

## **From refusal to innovation: The value of critique**

*“If you want to struggle, here are some key points, here are some lines of force, here are some constrictions and blockages.” (Foucault, 2009a, p. 3)*

This thesis set out to offer a critical contribution within a field of research dominated by essentialist constructions of food poverty to open a space for critique and allow alternative ways of being and thinking to emerge. Drawing on Foucault’s critical ethos in the introduction, I argued that such analysis of food charity first requires a refusal of all essentialist thinking

about any solutions presented as natural, common-sense expressions of kindness and community. Although Foucault is often accused of denying any potential for change in the face of all-powerful discourses, he recognised the dangers in any “prophetic discourse” promising radical reform to encourage instead a critical stance as on-going, complicated and time staking work of transformation:

*“Critique doesn’t have to be the premise of a deduction that concludes, “this then is what needs to be done”. It should be an instrument for those who fight, those who resist and refuse what is. Its use should be in processes of conflict and confrontation, essays in refusal.” (Foucault, 2002b, p. 236)*

My claim here is to offer *one* such possible analysis of food charity, which people can use, refute or draw on as an instrument in the discursive struggles yet to come. I offer no easy answers but an essay in refusal as invitation to think differently about how food poverty is problematised and governed by an expanding network of pastoral agents, business partners and a growing advice industry. My hope is that it will provide a starting point for a critical ontology of ourselves (Lemke, 2011b) as on-going political work capable of resisting simple solutions claiming to be outside of power and critique, in favour of historically sensitive and empirically grounded analyses of what is at stake in becoming neoliberal subjects. There is nothing hidden about the cultural practices which divide and govern us and there is no disguised reality of poverty waiting to be discovered.

In chapter 3, I advocated the use of critical discourse analysis as a politicising instrument dedicated to social change and intervention rather than mere description of discursive realities. Yet, as an instrument for change, this study does not offer ready-made solutions, nor does it outline specific alternatives or prescribe acts of liberation for those I consider to be dominated by neoliberal discourses. Instead, I wish to facilitate innovation, encourage doubt and democratic debate as collective efforts to build alliances beyond academia through which people can recognise the interests of powerful groups and weigh up possible alternatives based

on the analyses of reality presented to them (Foucault, 1988a). This form of critique is not directed at volunteers or charities but at the discourses and unquestioned truths which guide their practices:

*“A critique is not a matter of saying that things are not right as they are. It is a matter of pointing out on what kinds of assumptions, what kinds of familiar, unchallenged, unconsidered modes of thought, the practices that we accept rest. [...] Criticism is a matter of flushing out that thought and trying to change it: to show that things are not as self-evident as we believed, to see that what is accepted as self-evident will no longer be accepted as such. Practising criticism is a matter of making facile gestures difficult.” (Foucault, 1988b, p. 155)*

The practice of permanent critique requires “analysing and reflecting upon limits” (Foucault, 2000b, p. 315) imposed on our reality and deciding what ways of acting, thinking and feeling about poverty should no longer be acceptable. I hope to make food charity as a facile gesture more difficult by showing that its acceptability rests on dominant discourses in Western capitalist societies of welfare conditionality, consumerism, personal responsibility and economic utility. Overall, it is a small contribution to a wider critique of neoliberal government designed “not to change people’s consciousness but to transform the material and institutional conditions of the capitalist regime of production of truth” (Cordero, 2016, p. 146). By refusing to prescribe solutions or reforms as “master of truth and justice” (Foucault, 1977, p. 12), it may be possible to invent a new “politics of truth” beyond the institutional regime of knowledge with its corporate and academic partners making poverty into a manageable and profitable aspect of a life reduced to a permanent state of crisis.

Consequently, I make no attempt to correct false consciousness in volunteers but encourage reflexive doubt by seeking confrontation and demonstrating how their everyday practices are informed and in turn support institutionalised discourses and create new divisions. Then perhaps, volunteers may recognise in themselves a position of power and authority in

constituting truths about clients by defining their needs and prescribing solutions. There is nothing essential about the paternalistic care which does not trust the poor with money directly, as the absurdity of people buying specific items on their behalf has highlighted how this domination could easily be reduced. Cooperative models of membership as opposed to market-based service delivery are one possibility closely connected to neglected questions about ownership of food. Building critical research networks independent from institutional and corporate interests will be vital in sharing experience, experimenting with different models, and inventing new spaces of solidarity and resistance, with some promising developments shifting from food aid to cash-based help currently emerging in Scotland (see Menu for Change, 2019). Possible alternatives which do not serve the capitalist order of things will require breaking open and overcoming the government of individualisation (Foucault, 2002e) dividing us into clients, volunteers and donors of charity. Finally, imagining solutions outside the charitable ‘food-aid box’ (Riches, 2011) must extend beyond building better infrastructure or inventing more effective relief systems as a collective work to stop institutionalisation, interrupt therapeutic discourses and reject their psychological explanations for social and economic inequalities.

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# Appendices

## Appendix A: Interview codes

Code System	#
Code System	7510
<b>Problematisations</b>	
Causes of food poverty	3
Debt	2
Climate of risk	3
Health	2
Benefit problems	14
Living costs	6
Low income	7
Housing	7
Universal credit	5
Lack of community	7
Personal crisis	9
Meanings of FP	63
Health and wellbeing	15
Proposed solutions	38
Community	60
<b>Interventions</b>	
Help and support	62
Eligibility	22
Skills training	13
Discipline	38
Jobs and employability	17
<b>Subjectification</b>	
Speaking positions	
FB Manager	33
Advisors	33
Client	163
Volunteer	72

Food bank practices	
Food parcels	46
Administration	22
Donations	42
Logistics	30
Location	44
Agency work	50
Referral	33
Signposting	19
Partners	4
Council	18
Supermarkets	45
CAP	63
Trussell Trust	28

## Appendix B: Template for Ordered Situational Map

Adapted from SAGE (2017)

<b><i>Individual Human Elements/Actors</i></b>	<b><i>Nonhuman Elements/Actants</i></b>
<i>e.g., key individuals and significant (unorganized) people in the situation, including the researcher</i>	<i>e.g., technologies; material infrastructures; specialized information and/or knowledges; material “things”</i>
<b><i>Collective Human Elements/Actors</i></b>	<b><i>Implicated/Silent Actors/Actants</i></b>
<i>e.g., particular groups; specific organizations</i>	<i>As found in the situation</i>
<b><i>Discursive Constructions of Individual and/or Collective Human Actors</i></b>	<b><i>Discursive Construction of Nonhuman Actants</i></b>
<i>As found in the situation</i>	<i>As found in the situation</i>
<b><i>Political/Economic Elements</i></b>	<b><i>Sociocultural/Symbolic Elements</i></b>
<i>e.g., the state; particular industry/ies; local/regional/global orders; political parties; NGOs; politicized issues</i>	<i>e.g., religion; race; sexuality; gender; ethnicity; nationality; logos; icons; other visual and/or aural symbols</i>
<b><i>Temporal Elements</i></b>	<b><i>Spatial Elements</i></b>
<i>e.g., historical, seasonal, crisis, and/or trajectory aspects</i>	<i>e.g., spaces in the situation; geographical aspects; local, regional, national, and global spatial issues</i>
<b><i>Major Issues/Debates (Usually Contested)</i></b>	<b><i>Related Discourses (Historical, Narrative, and/or Visual)</i></b>
<i>As found in the situation; see positional map</i>	<i>e.g., normative expectations of actors, actants, and/or other specified elements; moral/ethical elements; mass media and other popular cultural discourses; situation-specific discourses</i>
<b><i>Other Kinds of Elements</i></b>	



## Appendix C: Questions for visual materials

Adapted from Rose (2016), Clarke et al. (2017)

➤ **Discursive objects:**

- What are the discursive objects?
- What are their different versions?
- How are 'problems' and 'solutions' made visible?
- What other discourses are drawn upon?
- What remains absent and unseen?
- What kind of seeing is being invited?

➤ **Truth effects:**

- How are accounts made truthful and persuasive?
- Who gains from them?
- What practices are being performed, by whom and for what purpose?
- What kind of conduct is being normalised and how?
- How is potential criticism countered?

➤ **Subjectivity:**

- What subject positions are made available?
- What can be said, felt, experienced and done?
- What are the rights and responsibilities?
- What kind of self-conduct and self-discipline is expected?
- What are the consequences for refusal?

➤ **Materiality:**

- What material artefacts are used and for what purpose?
- What spatial divisions are there?
- What are the links between physical space/design and guidance of conduct?
- How do material objects limit the range of the sayable and doable in the situation?

➤ **Critical reflection on visibility:**

- What practices are supported and legitimised?
- How are possible alternatives anticipated, subverted or integrated?
- What kind of knowledge does it make visible, normalise and reproduce?
- What are the wider social consequences and power effects?

## Appendix D: Interview schedule

### 1. Introduction and briefing

- Name, Role ☐
- Nature of research, aims ☐
- Informed consent ☐
- Recording and withdrawal ☐

### 2. Personal role and institution

#### ➤ **Role at food bank**

What is your role at the food bank? What do you do?  
How long for? What responsibilities?

#### ➤ **History of FB**

How did the FB start? Any local support? What about finance?  
Relevance of church setting? What kind of Trussell support?

#### ➤ **Location and Trussell franchise**

Different distribution centres, networking?  
Benefits of Trussell membership?

#### ➤ **History and reasons for volunteering**

What made you decide to volunteer? Any friends/family involved?  
Any relation to faith or church community?

#### ➤ **Personal experiences: Good and bad, benefits**

How would you describe your own experience since starting?  
What were good or bad things you can remember?  
What kind of difference do you feel you can make personally?

### 3. Food bank routines

#### ➤ **Referral process: Talk through steps**

**Who can access** food parcels? What is the process?  
**Voucher** distribution: What are the rules? Any room for exceptions?  
**Any limits** to how many referrals or maximum parcels?  
**What goes into** food parcel? Who decides?

#### ➤ **Food provision**

What kind of services? How frequently?

#### ➤ **More than food**

“More than food” pilot, training and education

Work with other agencies and groups? **What about CAP?**

#### ➤ **Food collection, storage and distribution**

Main sources of donations? Where can people donate?  
Most frequent/most needed donations? How do you communicate needs?  
Enough storage space? Any fresh food?

#### **Fundraising and other community activities**

Any other activities for FB, church or within community?  
What sort of engagement with public? Any publicity work?

#### **4. Client services**

➤ **Relationship and interactions with clients**

Who are the usual clients? From local area?

What sort of engagement and interaction during collections?

Personal conversations? About what?

What sort of advice? What questions?

➤ **Main causes and challenges**

Most frequent reasons for use?

Anything particular to this area?

➤ **Client needs and demands**

Assess how? Any feedback or unhappiness?

➤ Referrals to other services and long-term goals

#### **5. Neighbourhood Food Collection**

Aware of collection events at Tesco? How do you feel about these?

Any involvement or collection points?

#### **6. National food poverty and importance of charity work**

Any changes in demand over time?

Role of charity in addressing poverty?

What about government role? Any room for political advocacy/campaigning?

How do you feel about how FP is portrayed by media? Images of clients?

What is the solution, locally and nationally? What is needed?

What about critics? Any plans for the future?

#### **7. Debriefing**

Quick summary, final comments, reflection on experience ☐

Any questions? ☐