"*No One Should Go Hungry*": The Challenges of Hunger Relief Efforts in Contemporary Spain

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Abstract: This paper critically examines the existing literature on voluntary giving and grassroots organizing involving hunger relief efforts in Spain. Two seemingly contrasting models are examined here: registered food banks that follow a top-down charitable framework, and grassroots food banks and pantries that are supported by self-organizing and localized political action. Registered food banks, which mostly tackle the interests of agri-business in giving their surplus food to the needy, have been successful in strengthening an extensive system of food-based charity in Spain. These initiatives, intimately linked to traditional philanthropy, are today challenged by alternative food justice movements that frame the distribution and access to food mostly as citizenship rights. While this paper addresses the ideological underpinnings that distinguish the two food aid models, it also analyzes their similarities. Chief among these is the fact that they both depend on voluntary giving, rely on an unpaid labor force in order to gather and distribute food, and launch food drives as a main organizational tool. This study ultimately hopes to raise awareness about the challenges in providing long-term food relief to vulnerable individuals, across all levels of poverty and scarcity, in Spain particularly and the developed world generally.

Key words: food banks, food pantry, food aid, hunger, Spain, solidarity, grassroots.

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Introduction

In 2012, the Wall Street Journal featured a story showing outraged members of a labor union in Andalusia, southern Spain, who had raided two supermarkets owned by mega-corporations (Mercadona and Carrefour) in order to bring baskets of food to local food banks. This, along with other looting that took place at the time, represented much more than an spontaneous revolt to feed the hungry: it was meant as an *acción de protesta* (a protest action) to highlight the dire situation of the "new poor," resulting from the growing rate of unemployment in Andalusia (Brat 2012). Since the start of the socioeconomic crisis in Spain in 2008, food-justice movements have been gathering momentum along with charitable organizations that, despite working with similar populations, respond to very divergent ideological constituencies.

Food is one of the most controversial and heated topics when it comes to debating entitlement, and access, to social and individual rights. Within the literature of social movements, dealing with the world of food is like opening a can of sardines — no pun intended — in which a vast array of dissimilar stakeholders, from organized charities to progressive social reform groups, coexist under the same roof. As Poppendieck (1999) notes in the United States, non-profit food initiatives — from corporate food donations to fundraising in support of natural-disaster victims — tend to breed an array of emotional responses rooted in a volunteer ethos.

The idea of lacking food, or having others in our proximity going hungry, elicits compassionate feelings of altruism and empathy that may be missing in other realms. Those who would never even consider spending countless hours of unpaid work for any other philanthropic cause will gladly give their time, money and goods for the sake of feeding the children, the homeless and the elderly. As also clearly noted by Poppendieck (1999), hunger relief efforts provide a sort of moral safety valve that helps reduce one's discomfort (and guilt!) brought up by poverty, dispossession and social exclusion, while creating the illusion that we can make a difference by helping reducing famine. Gascón & Montagut (2015) observe that the individual urge to do something against hunger has also been cleverly orchestrated by a post-industrial consumerist culture that places the blame for food wasting on the individual and family level, rather than on the agro-industrial machinery that treats food as a commodity — with surpluses that are strategically discarded from the market in order to keep food prices high.

Food donation is actually one of the oldest forms of charity, both religious and secular, in both the Western and Eastern worlds (Bremner 1996; Rubin 2002). In modern times, beneficent organizations emerged as an organized model of social aid on the basis of proven need (from Sweden to Argentina, Viladrich & Thompson 1996). The right to food became a key component of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which was passed in 1948 as part of the convened states' agreement to guarantee an adequate quality of life to its citizens (General Assembly, U.N. 1948). The consolidation of the welfare state, from the 1960s to the 1980s, guaranteed the protection of human and social rights — thus replacing charities in the meeting of people's basic needs.

The later crisis of the welfare model, overpowered by the reign of globalized neoliberalism under the patronage of the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank, has gone hand in hand with privatization, the reduction of public spending and the deregulation of labor and financial markets. Together, these phenomena have been accompanied by the dismantling of government safety nets, rising levels of poverty, unemployment and homelessness (Herrera-Pineda & Pereda-Olarte 2017; Riches & Silvasti 2014). From the mid-1980s on, the growth of the so-called "third sector" — an umbrella term that encompasses dissimilar non-profit and volunteer groups — has somehow been called on to replace the state in the satisfaction of pressing needs, particularly among those without full-time employment and/or working in the informal economy (Martínez Virto 2015; Mata Romeu & Pallarés Gómez 2014). This trend has become even more visible in the last decades thanks to the work of organized philanthropies, which have been called on to provide services that were formerly the responsibility of the public sector.

No longer the realm of the welfare state, food-relief efforts are today particularly problematic not just in developing nations, but also in developed ones. Under the reign of neo-liberal systems, "hunger" has turned into a familiar term in the first world. As noted by Riches & Silvasti (2014) food insecurity in rich countries has continued to rise even a decade after the onset of the economic global recession. In the United States, efforts to downsize "big government" have led to the reduction of much-needed social welfare programs including Food

Stamps (now called Supplemental Nutrition Action Program, or SNAP)[1].

The growing demand for nutritional aid among vulnerable groups along with the exponential rise of organized food charities in Europe (particularly in Spain) in recent years, has led to an increasing academic interest in food insecurity (Davis & Geiger 2017). In Spain, a well-organized army of philanthropic organizations led by Cáritas, the Red Cross, Arrels Fundació (in Catalonia), and registered food banks, among others, have become increasingly relevant in meeting the needs of the poor and other at-risk populations. In Barcelona alone, the largest food bank has doubled its aid to charities in just a few years by distributing thousands of tons of food to local charities (Fundació Banc dels Aliments Barcelona 2012).

Meanwhile, religious organizations in Spain have continued being key players in the food donation and distribution system targeting the poor. In Catalonia, for instance, Cáritas has become the "gold standard" of voluntary giving, being routinely rewarded by the public and private sectors, politicians and the media for its achievements in meeting the basic needs of the poor (Mata Romeu & Pallarés Gómez 2014). In 2012, Cáritas received a medal of honor from the Parliament of Catalonia in recognition of its work in "fighting poverty". Similar initiatives, intimately linked to traditional philanthropy, are today challenged by alternative forms of food justice in which the distribution and access to food are framed by notions involving both human and citizenship rights.

In the following pages, this paper critically discusses the existing literature on food banks, voluntary giving and grassroots organizing around hunger relief in Spain. In the context of state retrenchment in the provision of welfare benefits and services, the ultimate aim of this essay is to assess the complex meaning of the diverse types of food banks in Spain towards uncovering their ambiguous nature. While on the one hand, formal food banks have continued reproducing a traditional charitable model of giving, on the other hand, grassroots groups operate on the basis of equitable distribution, participatory democracy and social justice. The corpus of this paper is based on a critical analysis of the research literature on the topic of food aid in Spain, along with a selected set of mission statements — from grassroots food banks and solidarity pantries — published online.

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[1] SNAP is still the number one government service used by poor families in the United States, with more than 32 million people depending on it as their main access to food (Libal et al. 2014).

Food Banks: Decodifying the Meaning of an Ambiguous Umbrella Term

"The organization of a food bank has a similar structure to that of a company, with different departments and a leadership team" (FESBAL 2017)[2].

In recent years, food banks have become the object of different theoretical stands in the literature, from those who conceive them as novel forms of social solidarity to approaches, based on traditional charity models, that are supported by uncritical forms of food giving (Handforth et al. 2013; Robaina & Martin 2013). Created in the United States in 1967 (Tarasuk & Eakin 2005), food banks became a phenomenon across the developed world half a century later, bringing a range of non-profit and grassroots organizations under the same umbrella term (Coque & González-Torre 2017).

Critical perspectives have questioned the role of traditional food banks by considering them neo-corporate forms of global food charity — organized through the collection, sorting and distribution of excess food in wealthy nations. From this view, food banks are deemed as key contributors to the very food insecurity that they are supposed to alleviate (Dowler 2003; Riches & Silvasti 2014). Poppendieck (2014) in particular has called attention to the role of food banking in the United States, as a pervasive way to undermine food justice and the human right to healthy food and nutrition while maintaining the status quo. At best seen as a band-aid to fighting poverty, food banks' use of discarded food to feed the hungry in wealthy nations is aligned with the interests of the agro-industry, which annually throws away millions of tons of food that cannot be competitively placed in the market (Dowler 2003). Even if motivated by compassionate and humanitarian principles, philanthropic food drives are seen as vehicles for normalizing indigence on the basis of strengthening a culture of charity (Gascón & Montagut 2015). The latter represents a pervasive substitute for the structural changes that are needed to truly remedy the unequal production, distribution and access to food.

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[2] All quotes are from Spanish to English, translated by primary author of this article, Anahí Viladrich.

As noted by Gascón & Montagut (2015) the term “food bank” (*banco de alimentos*) has diverse meanings in Spain: the first connotation, a generic one, typically refers to any practice of food gathering and storage targeting those in need. The second, and formal, meaning of food banks involves institutionalized charitable giving practices represented by well-established organizations that distribute food to smaller groups and largely depend on European Union subsidies. These initiatives are in alignment with the American model and operate as large food storage and supply depots that deliver vegetables, grains, meat and non-perishable items to front line agencies and community organizations (Coque et al. 2015). A third definition of food banks is represented, as found in this study, by informal community groups and self-organized grassroots organizations that were ignited by the 15-M movement in Spain. In this country, only registered food banks own the copyright to the label. In fact, the free use of the term “food banks” by grassroots food-distribution organizations and pantries has led lo legal suits on the part of registered food banks and public evictions of the former (Gascón & Montagut 2015).

As in other developed countries, most food banks in Spain — regardless of their ideological underpinnings and organizational structure — depend on a steady stream of volunteers devoted to allocating non-perishable and fresh goods to homeless hostels, soup kitchens, family and children’s associations, youth and addiction rehabilitation groups, religious residential centers and labor unions[3]. Following the examples of France and Belgium, Spain was the third country in Europe to fund a registered food bank (in Barcelona, 1987) that served as a template for similar ones created soon after (Pérez de Armiño 2014). As of today, there are 56 registered food banks in Spain, all of them supervised by the Spanish Federation of Food Banks (*Federación Española de Bancos de Alimentos, FESBAL*). Gomez & Montagut (2015) plainly point out the marriage between food philanthropy and the corporate world, by noting that a large number of those placed in high leadership roles in Spanish food banks have come from the agribusiness industry.

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[3] The largest groups of recipients of registered food banks in Spain are immigrants (28%) followed by the elderly (21%), drug addicts (12%), the homeless (10%), long-term unemployed (9%), children and teenagers (7%), terminally-ill individuals and their relatives (6%), and others (7%) (FESBAL 2013).

Each year, the Spanish food bank movement organizes the Great Food Collection, a large food drive that has become a national symbol of charitable giving. During Christmas 2013, the Catalan campaign *Gran Recapte de Nadal* (Big Christmas Gathering) resulted in an increase in sales of 3.634 million tons of food, which was immediately donated to diverse charities (Gascón & Montagut 2015). These authors observe that it is no small feat getting twenty thousand volunteers — in Catalonia alone — to stand at the entrance of supermarkets over the course of a whole weekend, ready to convince customers to buy products to be bestowed to local food banks. Although these massive gift campaigns provide the least amount of goods collected annually by registered food banks, they play a key role in mobilizing a sense of kindhearted interest in people's welfare (Pérez de Armiño 2014). Conversely, these sorts of contemporary giving practices are far from selfless — they blend a consumerist tenet (e.g., shopping at and donating from super-markets) with one of the noblest human feelings: compassion.

Registered Food Banks: A Spanish Business Model of Charitable Giving

Conceived as part of a well-oiled machine within the food-supply chain, registered food banks rely on a corporate model that involves both upstream and downstream agents (Coque & González-Torre 2017; Coque et al. 2015). Within upstream channels, we find donors of a diverse nature including hypermarkets, fresh food markets, wholesalers, warehouses, traders, transport industries, as well as wealthy individuals. Donated food may enter the system at different points in the food donation pyramid: from farmers and manufacturers who have overproduced staples, or whose food is deemed "defective" or not visually appealing, to retailers who have bought more food than what they are able to sell at competitive prices. Recipient organizations are found down the line and usually represent two types: distribution centers and food pantries. From this perspective, food banks are seen as rational initiatives that offer opportunities beyond the public and private sectors — thus the name, third sector — to redistribute valuable goods from those who do not need them to those who do (Coque & González-Torre 2017; Chaves et al. 2000; Salamon 2010).

The ideological underpinning of registered food banks in Spain has been framed on the notion of representing a sort of wholesaler that works towards preventing food waste while serving the needy. Besides, food banks manage surpluses of staples that cannot otherwise enter the market. They also reduce waste and environmental pollution by avoiding the dumping of unused food — which is expensive and demands a considerable amount of capital. Ultimately, these organizations have become savvy agents in the recycling machinery of food by offering a rational, low-cost method of disposal (Silvasti & Riches 2014). Registered food banks also help promote the reputation of food companies as donors of goods, along with corporate philanthropy and social responsibility campaigns that greatly help boost, and solidify, consumers' loyalty.

Not surprisingly, in Spain (and in Europe generally) a significant body of research on food banks has been conducted by the business and managerial fields, which often highlight the endemic presence of hunger as a result of food waste (Coque & González-Torre 2017; González-Torre & Coque 2016). From this perspective, food banks are deemed as effective tools for reducing hunger while helping improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the whole food-donating machinery (González-Torre & Coque 2016). We now turn to analyzing an alternative model of food aid in Spain which, particularly since the inception of the 15M movement, has turned into an emblematic community-based model of social and political change.

Despensas Solidarias (Solidarity Food Pantries): Framing Reciprocity as Collective Action

A novel phenomenon of grassroots food distribution emerged in Spain as a result of the socio-economic crisis of 2008 that soon led to broad, social movement-based, bottom-up community organizing initiatives. A set of anti-austerity movements, popularly known as *Movimiento 15-M* (15-M Movement), the *Indignados* (Indignant) Movement, and Take the Square, were born on the onset of mass demonstrations that began on May 15, 2011 — days before the local and regional elections of May 22 (Anduiza et al. 2014). By relying on social media and digital platforms such as *¡Democracia Real YA!* (Real Democracy, NOW!), thousands of protesters took over the streets and made sounded demands against cuts in welfare benefits, rising unemployment and evictions, and a two-party system that was said to be serving the interest of a small minority. Despite this movement's disparate agendas, protesters shared calls for basic citizenship entitlements that included the right to work, food, health, housing and education (Albrecht 2012).

As noted by Basaigoti Rodríguez and Bru Martín (2014) the crisis that led to the 15-M Movement in Spain led to new versions of social economy that inspired the creation of novel "social contracts". Not only did these require Spanish citizens to demand state intervention in order to protect them, but also a stronger civil society on the basis of participatory democracy and self-organization. With the launch of 15-M, Spanish grassroots initiatives (on the basis of cooperativism, horizontality, and transversality) gave birth to solidarity food banks and pantries (Alberich 2016).

As is the case with other undertakings that emerged from the 15-M and the *Indignados* movement, grassroots banks and pantries in Spain adhere to a community-based approach that acknowledges the multifold dimensions of poverty and social exclusion. Standing, for the most part, against conventional political viewpoints (e.g., labels used by socialist organizations or other leftist parties) these groups' platforms usually target ordinary citizens regardless of their various political affiliations (Flesher Fominaya 2015).

For instance, the association *Red de Solidaridad Popular* (Popular Solidarity Network, PSN) was created in Madrid in 2013 and, since then, has worked on four areas: food sovereignty, medical care, support to public education and legal aid (Basagoiti Rodríguez & Bru Martín 2014). The PSN does not seek or accept funding from the state and finances its programs through donations, the sale of merchandise and the organization of events (Basagoiti Rodríguez & Bru Martín 2014). All PSN participants are both volunteers and recipients of help; thus their motto: "I give, I receive". This group makes a sharp political statement by distinguishing itself from other registered foods banks as follows (RSP 2017):

> The solidarity pantries of the PSN may remind many people of the food banks. They will not be so misleading because they operate similarly. However, we call them pantries in order to move away from the concept of a bank, which is closely associated with the idea of accumulation and appropriation of wealth — the essence of this system's socioeconomic situation, which is having such dire consequences for the majority of the population. In contrast, a pantry suggests the idea of preserving and providing groceries when they are needed. In no case will these be accumulated for either speculative purposes or personal enrichment; the only goal is to meet families and communities' future food needs. They [solidarity pantries] seek therefore the common good.

Even though the statement above points to the main ideological differences between the PSN and registered food banks, it also acknowledges a similar means of collecting food — in most cases through food donations that ultimately come from corporations. Contrary to traditional charity models, solidarity-based initiatives firmly oppose the hierarchical structure of registered food banks, in which participants are turned into dependent and passive recipients (Herrera-Pineda & Pereda Olarte 2017).

As movements aimed at counteracting the effects of globalization and agro-business, the idea of food as a right — ideally to be guaranteed by the government to its citizenry — has been fueled by these groups' ingrained sovereignty values, on the basis of giving people the right to decide what they eat and what they produce (Tang et al. 2014). Grassroots pantries' main motto is inspired by the principle: "No to welfare: anyone who does not collaborate, does not receive". Consequently, a common theme across these solidarity projects is that all beneficiaries must participate via a horizontal exchange which regularly takes place at public assemblies (Flesher Fominaya 2015; Gascón & Montagut 2015). Grassroots food banks require their recipients to become active participants (and "doers") as a prerequisite for receiving any type of goods — from perishable staples to diapers and soap. To further illustrate this principle, let us take a look at the mission statement from the Neighborhood Association Ciutat Meridiana, located in what is considered the poorest neighborhood in Barcelona (López 2017):

> [We are] neighbors that organize ourselves to assure decent housing, to distribute the food we have to everyone, to people that are able to come up with imaginative solutions to solve their needs and that become self-aware — and bring awareness to others — that what happens to them is not the result of either bad luck or a play of destiny, but of injustice; in other words, people that think and stand up by themselves to fight for their rights and put them into practice.

Curiously, while the largest registered food bank in Spain has its headquarters in Catalonia, it is in this province that we find one of the best organized grassroots banks, the Xarxa d'Aliments Gràcia (2017) of Barcelona, that spells out the following statement of principles on its website:

> The food network is a project that aims to meet a basic need such as food through mutual aid and solidarity. It consists of organizing, collectively and horizontally, both the collection of food and its distribution in an assembly form, while performing different activities in order to create links and trust among all participants. Through the network,

> edible foods are used and managed so they will not go to waste despite being in good condition. Food is a right and not a commodity!

In sum, grassroots initiatives and neighborhood organizing in Spain have contributed to make visible the exclusionary conditions that affect large segments of the population, on the basis of promoting diversity and horizontality — two of the main principles of 15-M (Herrera-Pineda & Olarte 2017). Nevertheless, there are also striking differences among these groups in terms of their political and social justice platforms, and regarding the food collecting and distribution practices they adhere to. For instance, while some groups will not accept expired or nearly expired items, others will openly endorse a freegan culture. The latter means that they will not discard most staples and actually gather them from garbage dumpsters. The practice of collecting food from trash containers at sunlight is typical of the freegan movement, particularly in the United States, and regarded as a vehicle for social protest and denunciation (Barnard 2016).

Exploring the Meaning of Reciprocity Forms: "I give, I receive"

Insofar as they function as tools for empowerment and social reciprocity, grassroots food banks allow an in-depth understanding of the role and impact of new social movements in times of austerity and economic retrenchment, both in Spain and elsewhere. Unlike formal charities in which one's poor condition needs to be justified, grassroots banks do not require means testing; therefore, recipients do not need to prove poverty in order to receive aid.

Despite of their laudable mission, these grassroots groups' scope of action is not without challenges. A main (mostly unspoken) issue they face is how to effectively contest and overcome a charity model, which they so actively oppose, by creating self-sustainable initiatives (e.g., urban community gardens, farms and orchards) that pledge to uphold the principles of food sovereignty and self-governance as viable long-term alternatives to the agri-business industry. For example, in an explanatory manual about the goals and functioning of grassroots pantries, the Popular Solidarity Network spelled out the following rationale aimed to justify their food gathering and donation-seeking practices:

> These requests are never presented as matters of charity, but as a question of joint responsibility on the part of businesses and companies

> within the community which they are part of… In the event that these types of companies refuse to collaborate "Platform Today for You" carries out public denunciation actions (press releases, demonstrations in front of large supermarkets, etc.) A fundamental principle in food collection is that of dignity. The solidarity pantry of Fuenlabrada does not accept donations of foods that are about to expire (RSP, 2017, 8).

On the same line, *La Villana de Vallecas* (The Villain of Vallecas, in reference to a neighborhood in Madrid) presents itself as a self-organized social center and as the "daughter of the 15-M" (La Villana de Vallecas 2017). This group focuses on three areas they call "horses": fighting eviction; obtaining health care coverage, particularly for the undocumented population; and strengthening their solidarity pantry, which they present as follows:

> The third horse is the solidarity pantry because there are people who are going hungry in our neighborhood, and we are neither Cáritas nor accomplices of the state. Therefore, we get organized in the pantry on Saturdays in order to get together at the supermarkets' doors and then, as in the forest of Sherwood, we distribute the loot in a horizontal and collective manner by taking into account each of our needs.

However, these grassroots organizations still largely depend on the same type of voluntary giving (i.e., food donations) that mostly characterize the models endorsed by registered food banks. Clearly, lack of sufficient and stable sources of funding leads grassroots food banks to seek food donations from traditional channels. These bottom-up initiatives also experience a "revolving" door effect as families may either leave these organizations once their most urgent needs are met via other means (e.g., when finding stable employment), or find the solidarity bank's participatory clauses to be too time-consuming and demanding (Gómez Garrido et al. 2018). Finally, we should ask ourselves about the feasible potential of these food movements to build long-lasting solidarity networks able to overcome social inequalities by effectively tackling existing power structures.

Discussion: Thinking Outside the Food Box

Within the so-called food movement there co-exist many different, and overlapping, ideological positions that support the principles and practices of food justice and food sovereignty (Patel 2009). For instance, the initiative for sustainable economies proposes resistance against the agri-food complex through a mushrooming of related, albeit dissimilar, political ventures that include food sovereignty, agroecology and land reform (Holt-Giménez 2009). Despite their differences, these groups do voice unified concerns regarding the impact of global food crises in deepening social inequalities in both the developed and developing worlds. Additionally, they call for innovative forms of food production and consumption, including the launching of producer-consumer cooperatives of locally grown foods, community-based agriculture and urban gardening programs (Renting et al. 2012).

Particularly in the United States, food banks have slowly (but progressively) evolved from a traditional role as distributers of surplus goods, to bottom-up organizations that empower producers and consumers on the basis of self-sustainable gardening and farming projects (Vitiello et al. 2015). Concepts such as "civic food networks" and "food citizenship" are presently being used to address the relationship between material goods and people's needs, beyond economic exchanges, while contributing to moralizing food economies (Renting et al. 2012). Yet, some are skeptical regarding the potential of these food movements — framed under the food security, sovereignty and justice paradigms — to be truly effective in challenging the unequal production, distribution and access to food vis-à-vis the role of charitable models of emergency food provision (Wakefield et al. 2013). Progressive food initiatives may not be enough to challenge the interests of the agro-corporate business model and in some cases — as discussed in this paper — may indeed contribute to reinforcing them. For instance, both the food sovereignty and the food justice movements are somehow constrained by neoliberal projects that may not only diminish their ability to impact change, but also make them prey to the same market practices they fiercely oppose (Clendenning 2016).

Now, let us briefly compare the two types of hunger-relief models examined in the previous pages; namely, registered food banks versus solidarity grassroots banks and pantries. Unlike registered food banks — in which hierarchies between donors and recipients are sharply demarcated — grassroots food initiatives aim at challenging the pecking order, by promoting modalities of mutual-recognition and collective action. These groups also tend to join broader movements called to transform social conditions: food being just one of their many grievances. They work on empowering principles aimed at restoring human dignity by denouncing the structural causes of poverty. Practices of individual and inter-personal empowerment are sought by making food recipients active participants in the food-supply chain. In this vein, grassroots initiatives develop community gardens and orchards that are allotted to food pantry beneficiaries, who keep a portion of their harvest and share the rest with group members (RSP, 2017).

Registered food banks, meanwhile, have somehow been successful in ameliorating food insecurity in the developed world, as they have played — and continue to do so — an active role as food providers for the needy and at-risk populations (Dhokarh et al. 2011). Even someone as critical of formal food banks as Poppendieck (1999) argues that these organizations' actual credibility and respect could be used towards proposing policy change, including supporting lobbying practices towards passing progressive legislation that would extend governmental food programs and social services for the poor. Yet, rather than denouncing the underlying causes of food scarcity and food insecurity, these organizations align with a traditional philanthropic agenda that benefits from their alliances with agro-business corporations.

Despite the striking ideological differences between the two models of volunteer-based food donations examined in this essay, a more careful analysis actually allows us to identify the similarities between them. Both types of organizations rely on a volunteer labor force, focus much of their activities on gathering and distributing (leftover and discarded) food as a principle, and organize community campaigns for food collection[4]. Additionally, and in line with Basagoiti Rodríguez & Bru Martín (2014), grassroots food banks could make their "best practices" more visible in order to publicly move beyond the neighborhood and municipal levels. A broader challenge these latter groups face involves developing and pushing a much more solid and participatory political agenda, aimed at advancing structural and long-term social transformations involving the democratic production, distribution and access to food.

Finally, we should reflect on a potential "mirage of equality" concerning the discursive and performative acts of parity endorsed by grassroots food pantries — particularly among those who donate and receive help. In other words, the kinds of inter-personal and network alliances that solidarity banks promote (and sustain) beg the question about their actual, and enduring, effect in transforming both the individuals that participate in them as well as the communities where they live and interact.

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[4] Gascón & Montagut (2015) point out that volunteers, within registered food banks, are not allowed to receive donations from the organizations in which they participate. In order to become recipients of food from such organizations, they must either stop volunteering for them or seek food in other municipalities.

Conclusions: From Food Banks to Food Justice

This article has offered a state of the art regarding the literature on food movements generally, and food banks particularly, in Spain. The rising hunger and food insecurity in this country, particularly after the financial crisis of 2008, has been accompanied by the retrenchment of the welfare state and the multiplying presence of new forms of food aid. Despite the growing visibility of Spanish food banks, there has been little academic reflection on the conceptual framings that support them. As discussed in this paper, the presence of registered food banks has been praised by those who highlight their role in assuring food security and as evidence of the strength of civil society. For others, the mere existence of this sort of organizations in the first world reveals the paradoxical relationship between a corporate system that promotes food surplus (and discarded staples) in order to maximize its profit, along with the rising number of vulnerable populations that increasingly depend on those foods to make ends meet.

Food charity, critical scholars argue, does not solve people's long-term nutritional needs and may actually increase their dependence on high-calorie diets that promote unhealthy lifestyles (Montagut & Gascón 2014; Poppendieck 2014; Silvasty & Riches 2014). Food recipients are also deprived of the human dignity that should make them free agents able to choose what to buy and eat (Riches & Silvasti 2014; Vivero 2016). By mostly delegating food emergency provision to third-sector organizations, the state has removed itself from its obligation to guarantee social and health services to its citizens. Almost counter-intuitive, it is interesting to note that while Finland and Canada are plentiful in food banks, they still rely on generous government-funded social assistance programs (Riches 2002; Tarasuk et al. 2014).

Within a market economy in which the number of people excluded from the formal labor market has become a collective in itself, grassroots food groups at this time represent a third option between the state and the market (Reygadas 2008). Conceived as a form of micro-resistance (Basagoiti Rodríguez & Bru Martín 2014), these types of food banks and pantries have emerged in contexts of interpersonal proximity under the principles of decentralized solidarity at the local level. This novel form of reciprocal commonality (also called as neo-communitarianism, Basagoiti Rodríguez & Bru Martín 2014) plays a dual role as a means to include oneself in alternative forms of (re) production on the one hand, and achieve social acknowledgement and dignity on the other.

We should also ask if grassroots groups' demand for recognition, on the basis of "the inclusion of the excluded", are enough to mobilize social change vis-à-vis neoliberal forms of social reproduction (Fraser 2009; Fraser & Honneth 2003). To answer this question, we need more qualitative and quantitative studies on the impact of both registered and grassroots food banks in transforming the lives of vulnerable individuals as well as on the system that excludes them. Although in principle, solidarity food banks play a unique role in proposing cross-class and cross-ethnic coalitions, more in-depth research is needed regarding their effect on improving food-security indicators and quality of life. Future work should address these groups' complex, and even conflicting, political agendas aimed at avoiding the refurbishing of old forms of charity — even under new veneers — as in the case of registered food banks in Spain.

As unique (although transient) forms of collective action, solidarity food banks and pantries in Spain have concocted a state-of-the-art formula of inclusion and recognition, along with novel strategies of awareness rising both within and outside their collectives. We do need to keep in mind that these initiatives do present limits in terms of their potential to challenge, and transform, the political *status quo* as they are not meant to substitute formal organizations — including labor unions or political parties. In this vein, and despite their limitations, grassroots food initiatives in Spain have done a groundbreaking job in politically framing key social demands, while giving voice to new social actors that, in complex ways, continue to bravely challenge the corporate food complex and, specifically, the agri-business mega industry.

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