

“Food for People, Not for Profit”:
Justice and the Food Movement

by

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Sometimes Pangloss would say to Candide: 'All events form a chain in this, the best of all possible worlds. After all, had you not been expelled from a beautiful castle with great kicks to the behind for the love of Mademoiselle Cunégonde, and had you not been turned over to the inquisition, and had you not roamed America on foot, and had you not run the Baron through with a fine thrust of your sword, and had you not lost all your sheep from the good land of Eldorado, you would not be sitting here now eating candied citron and pistachios.' - 'That is well said,' replied Candide, 'but we must cultivate our garden.'

- Voltaire *Candide*

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Preface

“Uh oh” I think to myself. “I’ve taken a wrong turn.”

Praying that I would see a sign to New Haven, I keep driving south on Route 9. It is getting dark, the sun is setting, and no such turn off point is in sight. I realize that I have Eric Holt-Giménez captive. Mortified, I turn to my passenger, and apologize for the half-hour detour we were about to take. He graciously waves the matter aside. What else could he do? To pass the time, I ask him about his latest work *Food Movements Unite!*, the reason for which he came to speak at Wesleyan in the first place.

In *Food Movements Unite!* Holt-Giménez wittingly asks food movement leaders from around the world: “What is to be done?” Currently, the food movement is fragmented, trapped in a counter-productive “non-profit industrial complex” of sorts, in which newly emerging food groups compete with the old for resources and funding, stepping on each other’s toes, and keeping one another on the defensive – ultimately blunting the efficacy of the movement. As the title suggests, *Food Movement’s Unite!* sets out to discover how to unify these fragmented food movements and change the food system.

Driving down Route 9 thinking: “Oh no! What am I going to do?” I soon find myself discussing “What is to be done?” Engrossed in conversation about food movements and their growing popularity, I feel a sense of relief, as if time were melting away. I take a turn onto I-95 at Old Saybrook toward New Haven. Finally

we're going in the right direction. At this point in the conversation, I finally turn to my passenger and ask: "Why are these food movements so popular to begin with anyway?" Are these movements united in a collective endeavor to combat the prevailing food system? Or are they truly at odds with one another, holding irreconcilable differences? Batting around a few ideas, we never arrive at a full conclusion – but we do finally arrive at the New Haven train station. I step out of the car to release my hostage, exchange a polite hug, and then part ways.

But the question: "Why are food movements so popular?" has stuck with me. Throughout the better part of this year, I have worked hard trying to answer this question. In doing so, I have been in search of a unifying element that connects these now fragmented food groups. This thesis is, in this respect, my response to the question: "What is to be done?" Although I am apologetic for the detour, the journey – at least for me – was certainly not in vain.

Introduction

Recently there has been an increase in activism surrounding food, or rather an upsurge of “food movements.” Local and independent agriculture projects have become increasingly popular as evidenced by the explosion of community gardens, greenhouses, guerilla gardens, green rooftops, chicken coops, and beehives throughout the country. Communities throughout the nation, particularly in declining cities with few or no grocery stores, are reclaiming vacant lots to create community gardens and produce healthy fruits and vegetables. In the United States, there are now thousands of community-supported agriculture (CSA) programs, up from just two in 1986. Farmers’ markets also continue to be the fastest growing retail trend in food, with more than 6,000 farmers’ markets in the nation, and sales reaching \$7 billion, almost double what they were three years ago. Even corporate giants, from Whole Foods to Wal-Mart, are looking to increase their stock of organic foods as the market for organic foods and beverages has increased from \$1 billion in 1990 to nearly \$25 billion in sales today.¹ Food democracy initiatives are cropping up across the US and Canada with unprecedented frequency as well in the form of food policy councils.

Globally, food movements are cropping up with unprecedented frequency as well. With the linked food price and financial crises of 2008, thirty countries experienced political uprisings, including the pasta protests in Italy as well as bread

¹ Bryan Walsh, “Foodies Can Eclipse (and Save) the Green Movement,” *Time Magazine*, February 15, 2011, accessed December 15, 2013, <http://www.time.com/time/health/article/0,8599,2049255,00.html>.

riots in Haiti, Egypt, and India among others.² There is also strong evidence that the recent revolutionary wave of demonstrations and protests in North Africa and the Middle East was associated with the dramatic price hikes for basic foodstuffs in 2011.³ In addition to spontaneous bread riots, international groups such as the Italian based Slow Food Movement and Terra Madre Network, as well as international food sovereignty coalitions, such as *Via Campesina*, the Brazilian Landless Workers movement (MST), the French Confederation Paysanne, the United States' National Family Farm Coalition (NFFC), and a multitude of other landless people's movements reflect the growing international trend of local food sovereignty advocacy. These movements are all actively working towards democratizing food systems across the world.

From farmers' markets, to community gardens, to international bread riots, food movements are occurring today with greater frequency and intensity than ever before. So why have food movements – from locavorism to bread riots – become so popular? On the surface, these movements seem divorced from one another with competing interests. On the one hand bread riots and guerilla community gardening projects suggest that there is a shortage of food supplies, and consequently these food movements are primarily perceived as responses to an overarching lack of food. On the other hand, locavores and advocates of organic food are commonly seen as elitists whose demands for local and organic foods are insensitive to the needs of the millions

² Holt-Giménez, Eric, Raj Patel, and Annie Shattuck, *Food Rebellions!: Crisis and the Hunger for Justice* (Oxford: Pambazuka Press), 2009, xi.

³ Annia Ciezlodo, "Eat, Drink, Protest," *Foreign Policy Magazine*, May/June 2011, accessed March 26, 2012, http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2011/04/25/eat_drink_protest.

of starving families around the world. As the leading liberal news magazine, *The Economist's* 2011 special edition: Feeding the World reports: “although the concerns of the critics of modern agriculture may be understandable, the reaction against intensive farming is a luxury of the rich. Traditional and organic farming could feed Europeans and Americans well. It cannot feed the world.”⁴ But while there may be a grain of truth to each of these explanations, they are nonetheless too simplistic as they fail to capture the political and economic complexities that food movements have historically countered.

Historically, food movements have been political and economic in nature, and as such are often associated with political unrest. This claim is based on Marxist historian E. P. Thompson's piece, “The Moral Economy of the English Crowd in the Eighteenth Century,” which suggests that food riots during the 18th century were not a function of food shortage, but rather of an overarching political-economic legitimacy crisis. This is not to say that inclement weather or natural disasters do not affect food supply or produce famine, but rather that food shortages are often due to a widespread inability to obtain food due to poverty rather than a genuine supply shortage. According to Thompson, food crises in late 18th century Britain and France were reflective of an underlying tension between the economic realities of the distribution of wealth, and what Thompson terms the poor's “moral economy,” which encompasses the traditional views and social norms of the proper and desirable accumulation and distribution of wealth in a community. In this regard, food crises become political in nature when the

⁴ “The 9 billion-people question,” *The Economist*, February 26, 2011, accessed February 10, 2013, <http://www.economist.com/node/18200618>.

realities of wealth distribution conflict with a society's expectation of the government and its role in regulation regulating the distribution of rights and entitlements.⁵

For example, in 1773, American Colonists assembled the Boston Tea Party to protest the British Parliament's exorbitant taxation of tea, which in turn informed the onset of the American Revolution. Again, in 1789, the French Revolution ensued after the starving peasantry of Paris took to the streets demanding bread, and were instead dismissed by Marie Antoinette's mythic retort: "let them eat cake." In 1917, the revolutionary pot was again stirred in Russia, as peasants and laborers marched the streets chanting for "peace, land, and bread." And again, in 1926, Gandhi's peaceful Salt March across India in protest of British taxation of salt was emblematic of the greater political fight for Indian independence.⁶ Throughout history, food movements have been less in response to absolute shortages of food, and are instead indicative of the prevailing discontent with the injustices produced by the predominant political economic order.

So, in light of the historical political-economic significance of past food movements, it is important to look at modern day food movements in the context of the prevailing political-economic order, which I identify as neoliberal. Neoliberalism, as defined by David Harvey, scholar and author of *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* is "in the first instance a theory of political economic practices that proposes that human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and

⁵ E.P Thomson, "The Moral Economy of the English Crowd in the Eighteenth Century," *Past and Present*, No. 50 (Feb., 1971): 76-136, accessed May 8, 2011, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/650244>.

⁶ Michellegerman, April 15, 2012, "Revolting Food Trends of 2011-2012," *The Wayne Roberts Blog*, accessed October 13, 2012, <http://wayneroberts.ca/archives/822>.

skills within an institutional framework characterized by strong private property rights, free markets, and free trade.⁷ The era of neoliberalism began in the early 1980s with Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher and their conviction that markets, rather than governmental intervention, were the key to prosperity. Ever since its introduction, neoliberalism has spread market values into spheres of life where they had never existed before, resulting in an increasingly privatized, deregulated, commercialized, and ultimately commodified existence. With this political-economic transformation and increasing commodification of our daily lives, societal preconceptions of government and its role in regulating distribution of rights and entitlements have been disturbed, resulting in a potential offense to society's moral economy.

In particular, this thesis will focus on the commodification aspect of neoliberalism. There is now a growing body of work on the ethics of commodification and the moral limits of markets in regards to many goods and services. Political and legal philosophers, Michael Walzer, Elizabeth Anderson, Debra Satz, Margaret Radin, and Michael Sandel all examine and discuss the ethics of neoliberalism and the moral implications of our increasingly commodified lives. These theorists discuss the commodification of various goods and services that include: surrogate pregnancy, prostitution, seats in public office, votes, baby-selling, healthcare, education, and human organs among others. However, none of these theorists directly addresses food as a primary example in their discussions of commodification and market

⁷ David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 2.

takeover of our everyday lives. In fact, Sandel directly implies that the commodification of food is morally permissible in his lecture “Commodification, Commercialization, and Privatization.” In making the comparison between paid advertising for book displays and the sale of shelf space for food products at grocery, he writes: “it has long been the case that makers of pretzels, potato chips, and breakfast cereals have paid grocery store chains for favorable shelf space. Now thanks partly to the rise of powerful superstores like Barnes and Noble, books are sold like breakfast cereals,”⁸ implying that the commodification of food resources is morally acceptable. But is it moral to market food in this way?

In Chapter One, I examine these theorists’ theories of commodification and apply their frameworks to make the case that food has become inappropriately commodified. Although food is and has long been regarded as a commodity in that it has been bought and sold on the marketplace, the notion of commodification as understood here, is less indicative of market exchange of a good, but rather the complete market domination of the production, distribution, and consumption of a good. In this regard, food has become “completely commodified.” What is objectionable about the complete commodification of food resources is not the market exchange of food, but rather the inappropriate market dominance over the production and distribution of food, and lack of social control over the food system. In Chapter Two, I discuss the historical progression of this commodification process to demonstrate how the complete commodification and market fetishization of food

⁸ Michael J. Sandel, "What Money Can't Buy: The Moral Limits of Markets," *Tanner Lectures on Human Values* 21 (2000): 91.

resources has allowed multinational corporations, under the guise of economic efficiency, to control the food commodity market and dispossess individuals and communities of their capability to produce, distribute, and consume food in a culturally appropriate manner.

In light of the recent complete commodification of food and political-economic significance of past food movements, I ask again: why have modern food movements become so popular? Is it because there are food shortages on the one hand, and an elitist desire for local and organic foods on the other? Or are locavores and bread rioters following the historical trajectory of politically motivated food movements, sharing a similar political motivation that challenges the complete commodification of food and thereby the prevailing neoliberal political-economic order? Motivated by this question, this thesis will challenge the conventional outlook on food movements as responses to food shortages and an elitist obsession with local and organic foods, and investigate both the theoretical and practical implications of the complete commodification of food and its relationship to modern-day food movements so as to discover why food movements are so popular, and whether there is a legitimate basis for such unrest. I maintain that once this relationship is understood, the unified nature of these seemingly divergent food movements in their shared defiance against the prevailing completely commodified food system will become more apparent and better understood.

To make this argument and demonstrate the relevancy of this claim, I examine the relationship between the theoretical objections to and the practical manifestations

of the complete commodification of food as articulated in food movements. As environmental justice scholar David Schlosberg identifies in his work *Defining Environmental Justice*, social movements add to discussions of theories of justice as there is a direct relationship between “the everyday experience of disrespect, disempowerment, economic debilitation, and the decimation of individual community capabilities and the emergence of social movements such as civil rights, indigenous rights, gay and lesbian rights, feminism, postcolonialism, and the more general movements for multicultural acceptance.”⁹ Schlosberg understands the relationship between theory and movements to be integrative and mutually informing. In this thesis, I similarly argue that there is a direct relationship between the theoretical injustices that are produced by the complete commodification of food resources and the real world onset of food movements.

In his work, Schlosberg further demonstrates how the reciprocal relationship between theory and social movements is critical for understanding environmental justice. Schlosberg uses theories of justice to explore the nature of social movements so as to offer activists a theoretical understanding of their positions and, in turn, uses activist definitions and material evidence from social movements to help inform theorists’ understanding of environmental justice.¹⁰ Like Schlosberg, I too will use theories of justice to analyze the motivations for modern day food movements. In doing so, I offer food activists a theoretical basis for their efforts. I also use the

⁹ David Schlosberg, *Defining Environmental Justice: Theories, Movements, and Nature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 39.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 5.

terminology and concepts from these food movements to offer theorists of justice and commodification a greater understanding of how the commodification of food applies to their theoretical frameworks and objections to inappropriate commodification.

Schlosberg maintains, and I agree, that movements provide a more comprehensive understanding of justice than theories alone can provide because they are better able to embody multiple conceptions of justice. This is due in part to the limits of theoretical focus, but also reflects the empirical reality and demands of these movements. The multiplicity of justice that movements provide is important according to Schlosberg, because justice is all too often narrowly conceived as distributive justice.¹¹ This critique is true in the case of food, as most discussions regarding food justice are often conceived of as a distribution problem, questioning whether or not there is enough food in the world to feed everyone.¹² Schlosberg has no objection to distributive justice; many movements define justice in terms of distribution. He, in a tradition of other political philosophers, merely asserts that distributive justice is not the only aspect of justice. In addition to distributive justice, political philosophers often examine recognitional and procedural forms of justice. Recognitional justice is realized when every individual and all cultures and ways of being are recognized and respected, whereas procedural justice involves fair and equitable institutional procedures of decision-making.¹³

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 39.

¹² *Ibid.*, 3.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 4.

Each of the types of justice: distributive, recognitional, and procedural make up a tripartite theory of justice, in which the three types of justice are all linked to one another. Equal recognition of cultures and ways of being are preconditions to a theory of procedural justice. In order for a policy to be regarded as just or legitimate, the opinions of all those who are affected by the policy must be equally recognized in its consideration. Furthermore, in order for an institution to retain legitimacy, it must distribute economic entitlements and extend political rights to its constituents. And while equal and universal recognition remains a precondition for procedural justice, these justices in turn, are preconditions for distributive justice. Procedural justice also reinforces recognitional justice by distribution of political rights to those who are affected by policy decisions, thereby encouraging equal recognition of its constituents. These three types of justice result in a mutually reinforcing and interdependent triad of justice.¹⁴

In using this tripartite theory of justice, I demonstrate how the predominant food justice, slow food, and food sovereignty movements are each a response to a respective element within a triad of distributional, recognition based, and procedural injustices. Although these movements represent seemingly disparate idealized aspects of justice, I argue that all of these movements are nonetheless similarly rooted in response to the complete commodification of food. This methodological framework is not to suggest that food movements are restricted to either food justice, local food, or food sovereignty movements, nor is it to suggest that these movements are isolated

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 28.

and independent of one another. Undoubtedly, these three idealized forms of food movements often overlap with one another and are in many ways greatly interdependent. However, for the purposes of this thesis, I have chosen to isolate what I believe to be three idealized types of food movements to demonstrate the ways in which each movement addresses a different type of injustice within the completely commodified food system. In doing so, I show the interrelationships and unifying element between these movements: the discontentment with the complete commodification of food resources.

I begin this analysis in Chapter Three, in discussing the food justice movement and bread riots. In this chapter, I demonstrate the ways in which the food justice movement and bread riots reflect a societal discontent with the distributive injustice produced by the completely commodified food system. Many policymakers and economists understand bread riots and food activism as a response to an overarching shortage of food resources, and maintain that the prevailing completely commodified food system is necessary to maximize production and feed the planet's ever growing human population. Food justice advocates contend, however, that the problem of hunger is not due to a shortage of food, but rather poverty. In this chapter, I examine this debate through the theoretical frameworks of Rawls's difference principle, as well as Amartya Sen's capability theory. In doing so, I offer theoretical and empirical evidence to support the food justice movement's contention that food crises are the result of poverty rather than food shortage. Furthermore, I suggest that the completely commodified food system cannot alone ameliorate the distributive injustices that are

associated with poverty, as it merely contributes to the further impoverishment of those it allegedly serves.

Chapter Four discusses the organic and slow food (as opposed to fast food) movements as well as locavorism. In this chapter, I demonstrate how these movements involve dissatisfaction with the recognitional injustices that are produced by the complete commodification of food resources. Advocates of these movements strive to preserve traditional food systems, quality, and safety of food resources, and encourage agricultural practices that favor the conservation of local ecosystems. It is the disintegration of food cultures and community, and the resulting cultural anomie and social alienation that is produced by the allegedly economically efficient complete commodification of food resources, to which advocates of the slow and local food movements object. Although the slow and local food movements are commonly recognized as elitist, this chapter nonetheless maintains that all people, regardless of socio-economic standing, ought to have the right to express their cultural selves and to have their cultural identities recognized – particularly when there is more than enough food to feed everyone, as is the case presently.

Lastly in Chapter Five, I discuss the food sovereignty and food democracy movements, and how they are in response to the procedural injustices that are inherent to the complete commodification of food resources. Food sovereignty, as defined by the food sovereignty coalition *Via Campesina*, is a community's right to define its own food and agricultural systems.¹⁵ But in the prevailing completely

¹⁵ Via Campesina, "The right to produce and access to land," *Voice of the Turtle* (1996) accessed

commodified food system communities have no such right. Instead an oligopolistic agribusiness empire controls the way in which food is produced, distributed, and consumed. In this chapter, I further address the commonly espoused market based “vote with your fork” model, which contends that consumers can influence the landscape of the food marketplace through food purchases (or rather by voting with their fork), and reject this model on the basis that 1) it is an inadequate mechanism of participation for those who are disenfranchised by virtue of the social and economic inequities of our increasingly market oriented society, and 2) it fails to address the recognitional injustices that are inherent to the completely commodified food system. Again, I employ the theories of Amartya Sen, whose conception of procedural justice as democratic freedom further supports the criticality of food democracy and food sovereignty in generating a food system that affirms both human dignity and economic necessity.

These three idealized types of food movements: food justice, locavorism, and food sovereignty, upholds a type of justice that has been discussed in this thesis: distributive, recognitional, and procedural, making up a trivalent theory of justice and a unified food movement. In particular, food democracy understands the interconnected nature of these justices. In advocating for procedural justice, food democracy implicitly links the recognitional justices that are upheld by the locavore and slow food movements, with the distributive justice values of the food justice

movement. Consequently, I argue that food democracy is critical in realizing a food system that affirms both human dignity and biological necessity.

Through this investigation, I demonstrate how food activists, from the bread rioter, to the concerned mom shopping at Whole Foods, to the peasant farmer fighting for autonomy, are all opposed to the complete commodification of humanity's most precious and essential resource – food. I argue that the only way to simultaneously satisfy the demands of these food movements is to democratize the food system. Only when all those who are affected by the food system (which includes everyone who consumes food) are able to participate in the decisions regarding the production, distribution, and consumption of food resources, will distributive, recognitional, and procedural justice be upheld. In the remainder of this thesis, I show how this single goal unites food movements, and acts as a motivator for change.

Chapter 1: Theories of Commodification in Relation to Food Justice

Food has been bartered and exchanged, bought and sold, essentially regarded as a commodity throughout human history. Even Marx, the author and primary critic of commodification, defines food as a commodity: “The commodity is, first of all, an external object, a thing which through its qualities satisfies human needs of whatever kind. The nature of these needs, whether they arise, for example, from the stomach, or the imagination, makes no difference.”¹⁶ Yet there is still something unsavory about reducing food, as a fundamental and essential physiological need for human life and flourishing, to a complete commodity, subject to the volatile and impersonal whims of the marketplace.

In this chapter, I depart from Marx’s definition of commodification as a use-value that is produced for exchange, to one that understands commodification as the market subjugation of goods and services. With this understanding of commodification, I argue that food has become “completely commodified,” subject primarily to free market principles of exchange. Furthermore, I employ the works of political and legal philosophers Michael Walzer, Elizabeth Anderson, Maragret Radin, Debra Satz, and Michael Sandel to demonstrate the ways in which the complete commodification of food results in injustice. Although these theorists do not directly address food in their discussions of commodification and injustice, I nonetheless claim that food as a biologically necessary, highly inelastic, and non-

¹⁶ Karl Marx, *Capital: Volume 1: A Critique of Political Economy*, trans. Ben Fowkes (New York: Penguin Classics, 1992), 126.

substitutable good, is prone to market abuse, and is therefore relevant to their discussions. In following these theorists frameworks, I further claim that food, insofar as it is thought of as a commodity, ought to be regarded instead as a partial or incomplete commodity, subject to distinct non-market norms and ideals that consider non-economic values in addition to market efficiency. The failure to do so, I argue, results in a coercive and corrupt completely commodified food market that yields injustice.

Commodification and its Critics

There is often disagreement among contemporary philosophers regarding the appropriateness of commodification of various goods and services, but neoliberalism has undoubtedly pushed the boundaries of what society considers appropriate. With the rise of neoliberalism, policymakers have come to now equate economic efficiency and market freedom, two major features of commodification, with genuine human welfare.¹⁷ But to presume that markets and market signaling can best allocate goods and services efficiently is to assume that everything in principle ought to be treated as a privately owned commodity, subject to the market forces of production and distribution so as to be produced and distributed most efficiently. This way of thinking idealizes what legal scholar Margaret Radin refers to as a world of “universal commodification” wherein everything is alienable, appropriately bought or sold as a

¹⁷ Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*, 2.

commodity, and regulated exclusively by market norms and economic ideals of efficiency.¹⁸ It is this Panglossian liberal utopia where “all is for the best in the best of all possible worlds,” in which US policymakers have based decisions regarding economic welfare, including policies that catalyzed the complete and universal commodification of food.

Commodification of all processes, things, and social relations, however, does not necessarily lead to socially optimal outcomes, despite what neoliberal economic ideology may suggest. This is especially true in societies that exhibit great social and economic inequality, as well as in instances where a good or service has a greater intrinsic worth or social significance than is reflected in its market value. In these instances, the application of neoliberal ideology and free-market principles to certain commodified goods and services results in injustice, the effects of which many contemporary philosophers have come to increasingly examine and critique.

Anderson is among one of several contemporary philosophers who have come to question the pervasive commodification of our everyday lives. For Anderson, “...what confers commodity status on a good is not that people pay for it, but that market norms govern its production, exchange, and enjoyment.”¹⁹ This characterization of the term commodification encompasses the relation between commodities and the normative structure that governs their distribution. With this understanding of commodification, the subjugation of any given good to the complete

¹⁸ Margaret Jane Radin, “Market-Inalienability,” *Harvard Law Review* 100, no. 8 (June 1, 1987): 1858.

¹⁹ Elizabeth Anderson, *Value in Ethics and Economics* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995), 156.

control and oversight of market forces satisfies the condition for what Anderson describes as “complete commodification” of a good or service.

For example, in the case of food, the term “commodity crop” and “specialty crop” reflect Anderson’s definition of commodification as a process in which goods and services become subject to market principles of supply and demand. “Commodity crops” are defined as those crops grown specifically for the purpose of trade, either through commodities exchange or in the cash market.²⁰ The most common commodity crops in the United States include corn, soy, wheat, cotton, and canola. Other commodity crops include tobacco, coffee, and other non-wheat cereal grains. On the other hand, “specialty crops” are defined by the US department of Agriculture (USDA) as “fruits and vegetables, tree nuts, dried fruits, horticulture, and nursery crops (including floriculture).” Plants are only eligible as specialty crops if they are intensively cultivated and used by people for food, medicinal purposes, and/or aesthetic gratification.²¹ So although specialty crops are distributed through market exchange, they are not commodity crops because they are produced for human consumption rather than for sale on internationally exchanged commodity market, which is subject exclusively to market principles of supply and demand. Thus in the case of food, the terminology used to distinguish different types of food production, whether a “commodity crop” or “specialty crop,” is a prime example of how Anderson and I understand the term and concept of “complete commodification.”

²⁰ From the “NFFC Glossary,” *National Family Farm Coalition*, accessed March 5, 2013, <http://www.nffc.net/Learn/Glossary/page-glossary.htm>.

²¹ “Definition of Specialty Crops,” *USDA*, last modified September 25, 2012, <http://www.ams.usda.gov/AMSV1.0/scbgpdefinitions>.

It is a neoliberal tendency to commodify goods and services, with the belief that the market subjugation of all goods and services results in a more efficient means of allocating resources, thereby enhancing welfare. But this understanding conflates economic efficiency and market freedom with genuine human welfare.²² Anderson reveals these limitations in what she identifies as the three principles of free markets,²³ the first of which assumes that economic freedom and market efficiency are inextricably linked to the satisfaction of desires. Instead of viewing fulfillment of ideals or public interest as variables in welfare maximizing functions, market ideologies instead privilege individual choice as the primary indicator of an individual's tastes and desires.²⁴ In the case of food, welfare is measured by the satisfaction of our literal tastes and desires as revealed in the market purchases we make. However, this assumption of preference-based welfare fails to recognize the potential worth of nutrition and tradition that may encompass welfare in addition to the satisfaction of wants and desires. If people solely sought to maximize their welfare based on immediate hedonistic desires, then many would undoubtedly consume convenience goods with high sugar, salt and fat content and low nutritional values. This is exactly what has come to take place in the marketplace today.

Consumers have shaped (and been shaped by) the marketplace in such a way that highly processed sweet and fattening products have become the least expensive and most accessible foods at the supermarket. But is this truly an indicator of maximal

²² Anderson, *Value in Ethics and Economics*, 164.

²³ *Ibid.*, 164-166.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 164.

human welfare? For the first time in modern history, American children today will have on average shorter life spans than their parents due to the ever-growing obesity epidemic and the rapid onset of diet related diseases. As former Surgeon General Richard Carmona states: "Because of the increasing rates of obesity, unhealthy eating habits and physical inactivity, we may see the first generation that will be less healthy and have a shorter life expectancy than their parents."²⁵ Although innovations in food science have contributed to improved diets, *overnutrition* – eating too much of certain kinds of foods – has now become the principal problem for Americans, and increasingly the world. Overeating deranges metabolism, makes people overweight, and contributes to increased likelihood of chronic diet-related diseases, such as coronary heart disease, cancer, diabetes, hypertension, and stroke that are now the leading causes of illness and death in our overfed population.²⁶ Consequently, we must ask whether the present food system truly promotes welfare beyond the scope of our immediate tastes and desires.

Second, market ideology is highly individualistic, and assumes that people are sufficiently capable in exercising their market freedom in a way that represents their values irrespective of external societal influences.²⁷ In the case of food, market ideology assumes that all individuals are capable of purchasing food products based on wants and desires irrespective of other societal influences. The amalgamation of

²⁵ "Overweight Children," *American Heart Association*, last modified January 16, 2013, http://www.heart.org/HEARTORG/GettingHealthy/Overweight-in-Children_UCM_304054_Article.jsp.

²⁶ "Adult Obesity Facts" *Center for Disease Control*, last modified August 13, 2012. www.cdc.gov/obesity/data/adult.html.

²⁷ Anderson, *Value in Ethics and Economics*, 165.

these individual preferences and purchases are, in turn, supposed to reflect social welfare-maximizing outcome, and therefore inform the types and quantities of products that become available on supermarkets shelves. But although it is a marvel that anyone in the developed world can go to a supermarket and encounter aisle after aisle of colorfully packaged food products and exotic fruit from Chile, this choice is merely exhibitiv of an illusory sense of freedom.

Recent research shows that the demand for these processed foods is based not on consumers' independent choices, but is driven rather by market supply and manipulation. As exposed in Michael Moss's work *Salt Sugar Fat: How the Food Giants Hooked Us*, "the food industry exploits people's desire for sweet, salty, and fattening foods, by deliberately filling their products with these highly addictive additives so as to maximize sales and profits."²⁸ Like Moss, nutrition scholar and author Marion Nestle contends that many of America's health problems can be traced to the food industry's imperative to encourage people to *eat more* in order to generate income and create profits in a highly competitive marketplace.²⁹ She further explains that in competitive food markets, food companies must satisfy stockholder interests by encouraging people to consume more of their products. Food companies expand sales to new audiences through advertising, most of which is directed towards the promotion of the most highly processed, packaged, and fast foods.³⁰ These companies

²⁸ Scott Mowbray, "Salt Sugar Fat' by Michael Moss," *The New York Times*, March 17, 2013, <http://www.nytimes.com/2013/03/18/books/salt-sugar-fat-by-michael-moss.html>.

²⁹ Marion, Nestle, *Food Politics: How the Food Industry Influences Nutrition and Health, Revised and Expanded Edition*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007), 2.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 22.

also expand sales by increasing the size of food portions because large portions appeal to customers, and because the cost of food is relatively low compared to labor costs and other factors that add value.³¹ Lastly, food companies continually develop and introduce new products into the market place to regenerate interest in their products and encourage consumers to eat more.³² In this regard, consumers are not as independent as free market ideology assumes. Consumers are instead highly subject to coercive marketing techniques that foster this “eat more” mentality and expand our craving for salt, sugar, and fat. This “eat more” attitude leads to Anderson’s third and final limitation of market ideology, which critiques the market’s tendency to fetishize goods and services.

Anderson finds market ideology to be limiting in the sense that it fetishizes the possession of commodities as a source of freedom or welfare, irrespective of what these commodities allow people to do once they are obtained. This understanding of commodity fetishism assumes that people primarily care about appropriating goods, and that their relations with others are purely instrumental in maximizing consumption.³³ Marx, who first coined the term “commodity fetishism,” meant the term as a way of describing the objectification of human relations and labor into commodities, transforming subjective human relations and labor into an objective

³¹ Ibid., 21.

³² Ibid., 25.

³³ Anderson, *Value in Ethics and Economics*, 166.

exchange-value.³⁴ But a similar fetishization occurs in the complete commodification and objectification of goods with subjective social and cultural worth as well.

In the case of food, the subjective value of food as a source of culture, tradition, and nourishment becomes objectified through the process of complete commodification. This objectification of food in turn devalues food as something to be appropriated and consumed irrespective of its interpersonal, cultural, or nutritious worth. With the rise of TV dinners and convenience foods, the intrinsic cultural, social, and nutritional value of food has ceased to be of worth. Instead, heavily advertised brand name products such as Pepsi, Kraft, and Frito Lay have become the new fetishized standard of economic value. This process of commodification in turn engenders a sense of alienation that neglects the relational component between food and humanity, the cultural significance, and the nourishing capacity of food for soul and body. The commodification of food resources divorces food from cultural and social context as well as its connection to the human body, and instead objectifies it as an instrument for realizing a perverse form of market freedom through consumption.

Marx further describes commodity fetishism as a form of religion, one in which commodities, as the products of labor, become “sensuous things which are at the same time spurasensible or social.”³⁵ In the case of our modern food system, the fetishization of recognizable brands like McDonalds and Coca Cola has resulted in a global cult following of brand loyal consumers. People around the world are constantly

³⁴ “So it is the world of commodities with the products of men’s hands. I call this the fetishism which attaches itself to the products of labour as soon as they are produced as commodities, and is therefore inseparable from the production of commodities.” Marx, *Capital*, 165.

³⁵ “In order, therefore, to find an analogy we must take flight into the misty realm of religion.” *Ibid.*

bombarded with advertisements from the food industry, delivering messages to consume more of these products. Dancing polar bears and Ronald McDonald compel consumers to buy more sodas and Happy Meals with the promise that these products will fulfill both their physical and metaphysical tastes and desires. Furthermore, these fetishizing advertisement campaigns encourage maximal consumption of these products, as seen in the pervasive “buy one get one free” and “more is better” consumerist mentality. And with globalization and the spread of multinational food corporations, this message is no longer restricted to the United States. The fetishization of brand name food products has spread throughout the world to the point where “Coca-Cola” is now the second most recognized word in the world, just after the word “OK.”³⁶

The religiosity of commodity fetishism is yet just one aspect of the neoliberal market faith. Within the capitalist paradigm, politicians, businessmen, and consumers have all become entranced by the promise of market freedom for realizing genuine human welfare. Blind to the ways in which markets fail, business leaders and politicians have constructed and supported a global food system based on these free market principles with the belief that market freedom and consumer choice would best realize human welfare. It is this illusory faith in market freedom and the religiosity of commodity fetishism that has given credence to the dominance of big

³⁶ Mark Pendergrast, *For God, Country, and Coca-Cola: The Definitive History of the Great American Soft Drink and the Company That Makes It* (New York: Basic Books, 2000), 8.

agribusiness and thereby the complete commodification of the food system. I will discuss this process further in Chapter Two.

Much of Anderson's work on commodification is greatly influenced by justice scholar Michael Walzer's work on dominance as it pertains to injustice. Walzer's work *Sphere of Justice* analyzes how society distributes justice in terms of wealth and power as well as social "goods" like honor, merit, work, friendship and leisure time. Walzer's argument, simply put, is that there are multiple spheres of inequality in any society, the challenge of which is not in eradicating inequality, but rather to ensure that no one sphere *dominates* another.³⁷ For example, economic interests should not dominate political contests, as these are separate spheres with different principles of just allocation. It is this dominance of one sphere, entity, or individual over another that produces injustice. In his work, Walzer further shares his observation of what he believes to be an unprecedented reliance on markets for the allocation of resources and the ever-pervasive commodification of our everyday lives: "Throughout history, the market has been one of the most important mechanisms for the distribution of social goods; but it has never been, it nowhere is today, a complete distributive system."³⁸ With the rise of neoliberalism, Walzer asserts that the capitalist relations of domination have come to crossover into inappropriate social, cultural, and political spheres, resulting in injustice.

³⁷ Michael Walzer, *Spheres Of Justice: A Defense Of Pluralism And Equality* (New York: Basic Books, 1984), xiii.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 4.

Pluralism and its Discontents

Walzer's spheres of justice are delineated by his notion of the social meaning of goods, which is based on a pluralist understanding of value. Walzer argues that it is impossible to have a unified theory of justice; he recognizes that people from different culture, backgrounds, and histories will likely reach different conceptions of procedural and distributive justice. According to Walzer, justice must be based on a pluralist understanding of value that is collectively derived from a shared understanding of the social meaning of a good.³⁹ Walzer calls for a system where different social goods with different social meanings are then placed in appropriate "spheres,"⁴⁰ each of which has distinct distributive principles of justice that are determined pluralistically by the society at large. Injustice then arises when the regulative principles of one pluralistically defined sphere crosses over or dominates another. For example, the rise of capital as the dominant social good and the relatively recent dominance of the economic sphere upon traditionally non-market spheres have yielded injustice. In the case of food, the dominance of food corporations such as Monsanto, Syngenta, and Cargill has in effect deprived individuals and communities of their capability to pluralistically define their food system in a culturally or socially appropriate manner, resulting in injustice.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 6.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.* Walzer's 11 separate spheres of justice include: membership, security and welfare, money and commodities (the market), office, hard work (distasteful but socially necessary tasks), free time, education, kinship and love, divine grace (religious freedom), recognition, and political power.

There are undeniable limitations to Walzer's pluralist understanding of value and justice as his contemporaries appropriately critique. Anderson is one of several critics who find aspects of Walzer's theory wanting. Although Anderson acknowledges that her own theory resembles Walzer's pluralist theory of value and spheres of differentiation, she nonetheless recognizes the faults of a pluralistic understanding of value and justice.⁴¹ She contends that Walzer's theory faces the common difficulties of shared understandings of value in that if they exist at all, they are often mired with contradictions and are often established in relations of dominance. It is difficult to escape relations of dominance in an entirely pluralist society.⁴² Although Anderson agrees that a plural understanding of the social meaning of goods and of justice is a beneficial starting point in legitimating market regulations of certain goods, she further suggests that justification for market limitations need not be confined to public reasoning. The pluralist legitimation of appropriate commodification also requires equality of participants so as to avoid a tyranny of dominant interests or the marginalization of those who lack the capability to participate in pluralist deliberation of the appropriate social meaning and distribution of a given good.⁴³

In the case of the current food system, corporate agribusiness firms have come to dominate what are now publicly conceived as the shared understanding of the value of food as a complete commodity. The complete commodification of food

⁴¹ Anderson, *Value in Ethics and Economics*, 143.

⁴² *Ibid.*

⁴³ *Ibid.*

resources is deemed legitimate by many in large part because it is widely believed that these corporations and the market system most effectively enhance human welfare. But this conception isn't necessarily a shared understanding among equals. This "shared understanding" of food as a complete commodity was instead established under relations of domination that have silenced the perspectives of marginalized individuals who pay the true social and environmental costs of the corporate food system.

As Anderson suggests, justice requires equality of participants, and currently there is an asymmetric power structure in which the neoliberal rhetoric of the corporate food system has come to dominate the discourse regarding our shared understanding of food. In generating her own theory of distributive justice, Anderson instead appeals to higher modes of valuation based on the intrinsic value of a good as well as ideals of freedom, autonomy, and respect to determine the appropriate sphere of governance for a given good. If the commodification of a good violates these inalienable principles, then Anderson concludes that limits must be placed on these markets.⁴⁴

Similarly, scholar Margaret Radin also objects to Walzer's spheres of justice on the grounds that his theory presumes that a free-market sphere could necessarily be just so long as the plurality conceived it as such. And like Anderson's concept of intrinsic worth, Radin's notion of "human flourishing" appeals to a theory of universal and inalienable set of human rights, which she understands as a regulative ideal to

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 144.

which commodification of goods must conform if they are to be legitimately regulated by market norms.⁴⁵ If the commodification of a good or service inhibits the realization of “human flourishing,” then the subjugation of the good to exclusively market norms and principles is unjust.

However, as political philosopher Deborah Satz argues, normative theories of value and appropriate distribution become complicated. Like Anderson and Radin, Satz recognizes the limitations of pluralist conception of justice in arguing that there is virtually no way of ensuring a unanimous opinion regarding the social meaning of a good. Satz questions the universality of a good’s intrinsic value, or its relationship to human flourishing, and challenges the notion that these attributes alone are legitimate regulative ideals. Who gets to determine the social meaning of a good or whether it inhibits freedom, personhood, autonomy, or human flourishing? Although she recognizes that some things are often regarded as priceless, such as honor, dignity, or love, she nonetheless challenges the contention that these social “goods” shouldn’t be commodified based on the subjective shared social meaning of human flourishing. She argues that these grounds are insufficient for limiting the commodification of goods; people will always disagree as to the social meaning or intrinsic worth of a given good, and consequently a theory opposing the commodification of a good based on these principles is tenuous.⁴⁶ Satz instead values a liberal conception of equality,

⁴⁵ Radin, “Market-Inalienability,” 1858.

⁴⁶ Debra Satz, *Why Some Things Should Not Be for Sale the Moral Limits of Markets* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 82.

and opposes commodification of goods when it undermines conditions of equal citizenship and effective democracy.⁴⁷

Satz's critique is particularly salient in regards to the examples that contemporary critics of commodification, such as Walzer, Anderson, Radin, and Michael Sandel, use in substantiating their theories of justice. Each of these theorists raises examples of inappropriate commodification of various goods and services including surrogate motherhood, prostitution, seats in public office, votes, children, healthcare, education, and human organs etc. on the grounds that commodification undermines the intrinsic value of a good or ideals of human flourishing. The complete commodification of these goods may seem obviously objectionable to some, but there are instances in which cultures and individuals may collectively conceive of different understandings of the intrinsic value of goods or services or their relationship to realizing human flourishing. Some cultures may view the complete commodification of these goods and services as rightly just. For instance, the value and regulation of healthcare and women's reproductive health is commonly subject to culturally contentious debate. In this case, the hope of a universal principle of justice seems just as untenable as Walzer suggests. Even Satz's criteria for appropriate commodification privileges political and economic liberalism in a way that may be inappropriate for some cultures. But this conclusion may nonetheless be misleading given that all of these authors neglect to address *food* as a primary example in their discussions of the deleterious effects of commodification and market takeover of our everyday lives.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 89.

Unlike other culturally contentious goods and services, I contend that the complete commodification of food resources is always inappropriate. This is because food is a unique good in that it is in fact a universally need-regarding resource, which allows it to transcend critiques of universal conceptions of justice. All humans need food, regardless of gender, history, race, culture, or class. Food is a biologically necessary component of human life, and is thus a non-substitutable and highly inelastic good. There is no amount of money equivalent to the choice of forgoing food for life. Furthermore, food, as a non-substitutable good, cannot be easily boycotted. Although individuals can choose to exit the market and grow their own food, the option of subsistence farming has become increasingly difficult, as the demands of modern life have required more and more people to enter the formal workforce. In addition, recent public policies, land grabs, and the rise of big agribusiness have also led to the dispossession of millions of former subsistent farming peasants throughout the world, who have since been robbed of the option of exiting the marketplace.⁴⁸

Although in the third of Walzer's six propositions for the theory of goods he states that there is "no single set of primary or basic goods conceivable across all moral and material worlds,"⁴⁹ he nonetheless suggests that food might be the one good that transcends historical and cultural particularism as a physiological need with genuinely clear distributive principles:

A single necessary good, and one that is always necessary –
food, for example – carried different meanings in different

⁴⁸ Saturnino M. Borras and Jennifer C. Franco, "Global Land Grabbing and Trajectories of Agrarian Change: A Preliminary Analysis," *Journal of Agrarian Change* 12, no. 1 (January 2012): 34-59.

⁴⁹ Walzer, *Spheres of Justice*, 8.

places. Bread is the staff of life, the body of Christ, the symbol of the Sabbath, the means of hospitality, and so on. Conceivably, there is a limited sense in which the first of these is primary, so that if there were twenty people in the world and just enough bread to feed the twenty, the primacy of bread-as-staff-of-life would yield a sufficient distributive principle. But that is the only circumstance in which it would do so; and even there, we can't be sure.⁵⁰

It is curious why Walzer felt compelled to qualify his statement in saying: "we can't be sure." The moral argument against hunger and starvation is not a particularly new or highly contested one. As prominent ethicist Peter Singer argues in his article "Famine, Affluence, and Morality," global hunger is a moral issue, the ethics of which are uncontestedly clear. For Singer, if hunger is preventable without sacrificing anything else of equal or greater moral significance, then morally, humanity ought to prevent it. Singer begins his essay by stating his initial assumption that involuntary suffering and death from lack of food is bad. He concedes that some may disagree with this stance and think that death by starvation is not in itself bad.⁵¹ Admittedly, this stance does privilege life with which some may disagree. To prove that death by starvation is as bad, as Singer states, a "difficult, perhaps impossible," proposition, but like Singer, I too will merely assume that death by starvation is bad, and concede that those who disagree need not read further.

I argue here that the need for food as "the staff-of-life," should provide a sufficient and universal moral basis for a distributive principle of justice, as Walzer suggests. It is recognizably fair to say that there is a limited sense in which a cultural

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

⁵¹ Peter Singer, "Famine Affluence, and Morality," *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 1, no. 3 (Spring, 1972): 235, accessed September 3, 2012, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2265052>.

or social meaning of a food could be regarded as primary; it is impossible to judge whether bread for the Eucharist is more important than bread for the Sabbath or as a symbol of hospitality, for these are culturally embedded concepts of bread's social meaning. But if there is enough food in the world to feed everyone (and there is), the primacy of food, that which sustains life, ought to be regarded as a morally sufficient distributive principle in ensuring a just allocation of food resources such that no one goes hungry. The universality of food as the staff-of-life thus negates Walzer's critics of pluralism and pluralist understandings of a good's social meaning and justice – at least in the case of food.

Because food has these economic characteristics - highly inelastic, non-substitutable, and not easily exited –it is highly vulnerable to market abuse and failure. Such market abuse has in turn resulted in food insecurity and persistent hunger, meeting the moral grounds upon which each of these various theorists objects to commodification, including human flourishing. Consequently, the primacy of food as staff-of-life ought to be a sufficient distributive principle to call the market takeover of the food system into question. And given that food is a universally need-regarding resource, there is a universal basis as to why food resources should not be regarded as a complete commodity subject to complete regulation by market norms and corporations. Therefore, the complete commodification of food, as understood as the market domination of the food system, could perhaps be the one instance in which market takeover and complete commodification is universally objectionable, as food is universally a physiological necessity for life. For these reasons, I argue that food

ought to be regarded instead, at least in large part, as a public good subject to the norms and regulations of the public sphere.

This is not to suggest a return to a Soviet style collective farming system with absolute government oversight. Markets have their place in a society and are undoubtedly efficient at distributing these goods. As Radin recognizes, it is necessary to move past the binary of universal and non-universal commodification.⁵² Marx's communist ideal is equally as romanticized and unrealistic as the prevailing neoliberal utopia of free market capitalism. Instead, Radin looks to a world of incomplete commodification, one that bridges the gap between these two ideals and allows for the sanctity of the institution of labor and tenancy while allowing people to make a living. Societies should reap the benefits of markets where they can, but must recognize the limitations of markets as well.

Food as a Partial Commodity

Here I argue that food ought to be universally regarded as a “partial commodity.” Anderson identifies partial commodities as goods that undergo market exchange but are still subject to non-market norms, autonomous from market principles and the profit motive.⁵³ As explained, food markets are not easily exited given that food is both a non-substitutable and need-regarding resource. Consequently food resources should not be regarded as a pure commodity,

⁵² Radin, “Market-Inalienability,” 1857.

⁵³ Anderson, *Value in Ethics and Economics*, 147.

completely subject to the market sphere. According to Anderson, when market exit is impossible, it is appropriate to consider the partial commodification of the good at hand. The partial commodification of food resources allows societies to reap the benefits of markets, but still considers public welfare by allowing individuals and communities to control their food system in an autonomous and culturally appropriate manner through channels of civic participation and local entrepreneurship.

In the case of the present commodification of our food system, it is not objectionable that people pay for food. What is objectionable is the corporate domination and complete market takeover of our food system. Although no one would object to compensating farmers for their services, few actually engage in direct business deals with their local farmer. Instead most people buy their food at corporately owned supermarkets, fast food joints, or restaurants. The commodification of our food system comes not only with corporate domination but also a concomitant loss of autonomy on the part of farmers, shopkeepers, and consumers. Farmers and shopkeepers were once able to control the production and distribution of food, and could do so with regard to non-market norms and ideals. But now farmers and storeowners are increasingly subject to corporate mandates, which are rarely dictated by moral ideals but rather by bottom lines. This loss of professional autonomy has in turn resulted in an oligopolistic market-driven food system, one in which human welfare is only considered in the limited terms to which markets are responsive.

The industrialization of chicken farming has become a well-known narrative illustrating the loss of professional autonomy within the completely commodified food system. As late as the mid-1950s, chickens were raised in small flocks, but now they are mostly “factory-farmed” in massive numbers and under contract to a select few large companies. Currently, four large companies control as much as 60 percent of the US poultry market.⁵⁴ Tyson foods is among such companies, and is one of the largest US marketers of value-added chicken products. Chicken farmers under Tyson contract are reduced to powerless contract labor, supplying Tyson’s operations. Under these contracts, farmers are required to purchase hundreds of thousands of dollars worth of equipment to construct new chicken barns. In doing so, many of these farmers must borrow money to enter into these contracts, but are rarely paid enough to cover the operation costs and company-mandated improvements to their facilities.⁵⁵ According to the United Food and Commercial Workers, as many as 71 percent of Tyson’s contract farmers earn wages that put them below the federal poverty line.⁵⁶ These contract farmers are then forced to sell their chickens at uncompetitive prices to these monopolistic entities. Consequently, these contract farmers become entrapped in a debt cycle, becoming all the more indebted to these corporations and their coercive demands.

⁵⁴ “Poultry Growers Deserve Fair Contracts,” *Food & Water Watch*, accessed February 1, 2013, <http://www.foodandwaterwatch.org/blogs/poultry-growers-deserve-fair-contracts/>.

⁵⁵ Eric Schlosser, *Fast Food Nation*, (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2001), 141.

⁵⁶ “Injury and Injustice - America’s Poultry Industry,” *United Food and Commercial Workers*, accessed April 4, 2013, http://www.ufew.org/press_room/fact_sheets_and_backgrounder/poultryindustry_.cfm?&bsuppresslayout=1.

In her work, Anderson distinguishes the ways in which professionals retain autonomy in a partially commodified market: “Professionals do not alienate control over their actions in selling them, but govern their activity by reflectively endorsed norms internal to the non-market ideals of their professions.”⁵⁷ Anderson is quick to note however, that although professionals are susceptible to corruption, their actions are nonetheless often embedded within the social norms and context of the community, which can serve as a check to corruptive practices and hold professionals accountable. For example, Anderson identifies doctors, academics, artists, and even sex workers as professionals, all of whom benefit from the autonomy to dictate the production and sale of their services that are based on cultural norms and standards internal to their practice rather than their profitability. For instance, doctors sell healthcare, academics produce understanding, artists produce works of art, and sex workers provide their sexual services. None of these goods or services can be considered as a complete commodity in that each includes what is often considered an intrinsic non-economic value. These examples are nonetheless still economic goods in that they benefit from aspects of market oversight, including professional autonomy, consumer freedom, and economic efficiency. These are all goods that Anderson identifies as *partially* commodified, as they are goods and services that are exchanged on the market, but are not entirely governed by market ideals.⁵⁸

As previously addressed, the social value of healthcare, education, art, and prostitution are all highly contested goods and services, the regulation and

⁵⁷ Anderson, *Value in Ethics and Economics*, 156.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 147.

distribution of which is morally ambiguous. But the value of food, that which sustains life, is assumed here to be a good in which complete commodification and corporate control is universally undesirable. Yet Anderson neglects to include farmers in the list of professions whose product – food – ought to be considered as partially commodified. The esteem of farming as a career has decidedly deteriorated over the years, and few would consider farmers as “professionals.” However, farmers’ services are fundamental to humanity as providers of food, an inarguably essential human necessity. Farmers are responsible for the nutritional welfare of society, and consequently should be properly valued as professionals equivalent to doctors and educators. But because farmers are not respected as professionals, they have not benefited from the same kinds of considerations as healthcare providers and academicians, who have remained largely autonomous and within the non-profit sphere.

The instances where healthcare and higher education providers have entered the for-profit sphere are often met with public disapproval. This public distaste is in large part due to the loss of worker autonomy associated with for-profit industries. In the case of the for-profit health insurance industry or the rising trend of online for-profit universities, doctors and educators in effect alienate control over their services by selling them for profit. And although doctors take the Hippocratic oath in swearing to practice medicine ethically and honestly, they do so explicitly in large part because these ethics are in direct conflict with profit-making principles. But unlike hospitals and universities, farms and food resources are now almost universally viewed

as sources of profit, the proceeds of which extend beyond the living wages of farmers, to building an oligopolistic food empire of large agribusiness corporations whose primary interests are not those of societal welfare, but rather of maximizing profits. Never before has a food system been one of profit maximization and empire building, left to stockbrokers, speculators, and corporate CEOs. It is this corporate domination of our food system, and the loss of professional autonomy in producing, distributing, and consuming food resources that is objectionable.

The problem with this loss in professional autonomy is perhaps best illustrated in Anderson's example of the sexual service industry and its moral implications. Although the enterprise of sexual services is a morally charged and culturally contested practice, Anderson nonetheless argues that it is only truly objectionable when the sex worker loses autonomy as a professional, as is the often the case in prostitution.⁵⁹ When the prostitute's actions are mediated not through her own volition but rather her pimp, she is in effect induced to the compulsory sale of her body.⁶⁰ It is this loss of agency and the concomitant coercion that is objectionable. But if one chooses prostitution as a profession, as a professional sex-worker, then the voluntary engagement in the profession of selling sex could be seen as legitimate. The distinction between prostitution and professional sexual services lies in the difference between servitude and professionalism. Unlike prostitution, professional sex workers retain control and govern their services in a manner that is consistent with the norms and non-market ideals of the profession. But prostitution is often regarded as an

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 154

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 156.

unjust industry largely because it is so rarely seen under these autonomous conditions.⁶¹

In a certain respect, farmers have become the prostitutes of big agribusiness, answering to dictates of corporate pimps. This analogy may seem hyperbolic, but there are nonetheless striking parallels between the two industries. Although farmers do not physically embody the products of their labor as do sex workers, their labor is still embodied in the seeds they plant and the fruits they grow. This same argument applies to food sellers, restaurateurs, and other food service providers. Thus the universal hold that large agribusiness corporations have over how farmers and retailers grow and distribute food is similar to the control pimps have over the sexual services of their prostitutes, and consequently results in a similarly coercive and alienating effect. Like prostitutes, farmers' actions are now governed by the profit motive, divorced from the norms and non-market ideals that govern their professions. I argue here that the distributive principles and ideals associated with the growing and sale of food - the fuel that sustains life - must be reunited with those professions that govern its production and distribution. The failure to do so will result in the constitution of a food system that is both coercive and corruptive.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

Coercion and Corruption

Michael Sandel is yet another critic of commodification, whose formal objections to inappropriate commodification further demonstrates the theoretical ways in which this system creates “coercive” and “corrupt” markets.⁶² By *coercion*, Sandel refers to the distributional injustices that arise when people exchange inappropriately commodified goods under conditions of inequality or economic necessity, whereas *corruption* signifies the recognitional injustices that arise from market valuation and exchange of inappropriately commodified goods. Although the commodification of food resources is not objectionable per se, the loss of agency in determining a culturally appropriate food system that is associated with the complete commodification of food resources, is in fact objectionable, and produces injustices, both coercive and corruptive as Sandel suggests.

With the complete commodification of our food system, farmers are now coerced into practicing certain production methods for growing food, and consumers are effectively coerced into consuming a certain assortment of foods as dictated by what is available and affordable at common supermarkets. The veritable cornucopia of food products at the grocery store gives the illusion of choice; however, most of these products are merely reconfigurations of corn and soy plants, which have now become the building blocks of modern food production.⁶³ Corn and soy are also the two most heavily subsidized crops, further cheapening those products that are made

⁶² Sandel, “What Money Can't Buy,” 94.

⁶³ Michael Pollan, *In Defense of Food: An Eater's Manifesto* (New York: Penguin, 2008), 117.

from them, which often tend to be those with the least nutritional value. For instance, processed chips, crackers, candy, and soda are often the least expensive products at grocery store. In some countries, Coca-Cola is even cheaper than bottled water.⁶⁴ So for many of those around the world who are too poor to purchase food of higher nutritional value, the present food system is in fact coercive. This form of coercion represents the distributive injustice that arises from the free market exchange of goods that have been inappropriately completely commodified under conditions of inequality or economic necessity. I will discuss this further in Chapter Three.

Sandel also identifies the corruptive elements inherent to the inappropriate commodification. In the case of food, this points to the cultural injustices that accompany the complete commodification of food. With the rise of the multinational food corporations and fast food industry, the cultural and traditional value of heritage seeds and family dinners has dissipated. The innovation and dispensation of sterile transgenic single-variety seeds and patent laws have corrupted the long-standing tradition of seed saving and heritage seeds.⁶⁵ This failure to recognize regionally adaptable seeds and culturally appropriate foodstuffs indicates an unprecedented cultural injustice upon the lives of many throughout the developing world.

Furthermore, convenience food and fast food restaurants have also overtaken what was once a sacred ritual – the family meal. Nowadays, busy schedules and hectic lifestyles have given way to grab and go food products, often of low nutritional content. This

⁶⁴ Sam Bozzo, *Blue gold: World Water Wars*, DVD, PBS Home Video [United States, 2009].

⁶⁵ Vandana Shiva, *Stolen Harvest: The Hijacking of the Global Food Supply* (Cambridge: South End Press, 2000), 1.

spread of microwavable dinners and fast food chains has in effect corrupted the cultural fabric that once gave meaning to the ritual and pleasure of eating. These examples of cultural injustices formed by the complete commodification of food resources will be further discussed in Chapter 4 on locavorism and slow food movements.

In his lecture, Sandel hints that the solution to these distributionally coercive and culturally corruptive injustices lies in the affirmation of procedural justice, which here entails the diffusion of power among all stakeholders in deliberative processes.⁶⁶ Procedural justice calls for the democratization of decision-making processes. Sandel argues that communities should decide the values of different types of goods and whether or not they should be commodified. Through public discourse, communities should reclaim the power to decide collectively the degree to which commercial enterprise and corporate advertising should be allowed. Through this pluralist discursive process, Sandel suggests that the commodification of goods would be constrained to those types of goods and services that would not yield coercive or corruptive characteristics should they be commodified.

In the case of the food system, this call for procedural justice is well reflected in the food sovereignty movement. The international peasant movement and global food sovereignty organization, Via Campesina, defines food sovereignty as “a community’s right to define their own food and agricultural systems.”⁶⁷ Like Sandel’s pluralist solution to the problem of encroaching commodification, the food sovereignty movement similarly seeks a democratization and reclamation of what has now become

⁶⁶ Sandel, “What Money Can't Buy,” 109.

⁶⁷ Via Campesina, “The Right to Produce Food and Access to Land,” 1996.

a completely commodified food system. Proponents of food sovereignty advocate that all stakeholders have a voice in the decision making process regarding the production and distribution of food resources. Such a request would require the diffusion of power from dominant agribusiness and food industries to the people. Procedural justice as it is advocated in the food sovereignty movement will be further discussed in chapter 5.

Chapter 2: The Complete Commodification of Food

This chapter provides a brief history of the transformation of our food system over the last century and outlines the process of complete commodification of the world's food resources. In addition, this chapter discusses how free market ideology has come to legitimate and reinforce the corporate hold over our food resources. Over the last century, the complete commodification of food has shifted food production away from small farmers to an industry of giant vertically integrated corporations. With the rise of neoliberalism, these corporations, aided by government subsidies and legal patents, have gained complete control over the food commodity market, resulting in the complete commodification of food. In outlining this history, I hope to demonstrate how the food system has in fact become completely commodified so as to establish a basis of understanding for the rest of this thesis, which discusses the roots of injustice within the current completely commodified food system. It is against this system, I argue that modern food movements protest.

Food Aid and Oversupply

The history of food aid and commodity assistance programs began early in the 20th century following the Great Depression and Dust Bowl. During this time, millions of Americans experienced widespread unemployment and hunger. But while increasing numbers of poor city dwellers formed extensive breadlines at urban soup

kitchens, farmers in the country were simultaneously overproducing food and experiencing market collapse.⁶⁸ As a result of these events, President Franklin D. Roosevelt enacted the New Deal to bring greater regulation and government oversight to the marketplace. As a part of the New Deal, the federal government enacted the first farm bill in 1933, known as the Agricultural Adjustment Act.⁶⁹ The federal government initially created the act to support the farm economy from further collapse. Through a series of progressive government policies, including price supports, rural electrification projects, and an economic stimulus plan, the federal government prevented many farms from foreclosure and saved many people from hunger.

During this time, the federal government also created programs that dispersed surplus crops to those in need, establishing what has come to be a long tradition of using food surpluses for food aid.⁷⁰ The act also established new regulations to stabilize food prices and to ensure better soil conservation practices so as to prevent crisis in the future.⁷¹ These progressive reforms stalled the complete commodification of food resources by shifting a significant portion of the production and distribution of food resources from the private to the public sphere. However, these reforms were not long-lived, and instead established the groundwork for the

⁶⁸ Robert Gottlieb and Anupama Joshi, *Food Justice* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2010), 90.

⁶⁹ *Agriculture Adjustment Act of 1933*, Pub. L. No. 73-10, 48 Stat. 31, May 12, 1933, <http://www.nationalaglawcenter.org/farmbills/#33>.

⁷⁰ Food and Nutrition Service (FNS), "Food Distribution Programs History and Background," *United States Department of Agriculture (USDA)*, last modified February 15, 2013, <http://www.fns.usda.gov/fdd/aboutfd/history.htm>.

⁷¹ Gottlieb and Joshi, *Food Justice*, 80.

consolidation and corporate concentration of food markets that have now come to characterize the food system.

After WWII and into the 1950s, there was a continued shift towards industrial agricultural practices. This shift included greater use of pesticides and chemical fertilizers, along with policies that favored land concentration and agricultural exports. After WWII, chemical companies that produced chemical weapons for warfare found new outlets for their products. By making alterations to explosives and nerve agents, these companies were able to reformulate these products for petro-chemical fertilizers and pesticides, creating a new industry of chemical agronomy.⁷² These companies helped give rise to the term “Agribusiness,” which first appeared in 1956 in the *Harvard Business Review*, to include all “operations performed in connection with the handling, storage, processing and distribution of food commodities.”⁷³ Agribusiness, along with the New Deal era price-support program, generated a surplus of food, which the federal government was then required to manage so as to ensure the stability of the farm economy.

It the 1950s, the Farm Bill focused mostly on how to use surplus commodity crops as a means to enter foreign markets and strengthen US anti-communist foreign policy objectives.⁷⁴ Former Secretary of Agriculture, Ezra Taft Benson and his associate, Earl Butz (who later became Nixon’s Secretary of Agriculture) were key figures in this policy shift. Their policies supported burgeoning agribusiness, the

⁷² *Ibid.*

⁷³ John H. Davis, “From Agriculture to Agribusiness,” *Harvard Business Review* 31, no. 1 (1956): 109.

⁷⁴ Gottlieb and Joshi, *Food Justice*, 80.

consolidation of farmland, and growth of agricultural exports, all of which have given rise to the creation of the present completely commodified food system.⁷⁵

After WWII, food aid became a critical weapon in combating the perceived threat of communism. But by the late 1960s food aid became increasingly expensive and cost prohibitive. When the oil crises hit the US in the early 70s, the Nixon administration created the Food-for-Oil program with the USSR, which added further stress to the American food aid program. This program, ironically, traded food that had once been donated to developing countries to protect against the rising threat of communism to the USSR in exchange for oil supplies. In order to maintain both the food-for-oil program with the USSR and a food aid program to combat communism in the global South, the US established a new food program, which has now become widely known as the “Green Revolution.”⁷⁶ The Green Revolution, in effect, catalyzed the complete commodification of food on a global scale, allowing international corporations to privatize and control profits and other agricultural inputs, a system on which farmers soon became dependent.

The Green Revolution and Corporate Consolidation

Funded by the Rockefeller and Ford Foundations as well as Western governments, the Green Revolution exported an industrial model of agriculture, spreading privately manufactured inputs of pesticides, fertilizers, and hybrid seeds

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

⁷⁶ Holt-Giménez et al., *Food Rebellions*, 26.

across the world.⁷⁷ Norman Borlaug, who is often regarded as the “father of the Green Revolution,” led a team of scientists in developing high yielding varieties (HYVs) of grain. In partnership with private agribusiness corporations, governments distributed these HYVs through extension programs across the developing world. Rural banks provided “packages” of credit, fertilizers, and modern agricultural machinery to farmers in Mexico, Asia, and India, effectively privatizing the world’s food system with government aid.⁷⁸ During the Green Revolution, subsistence farmers abandoned their traditional farming practices in droves to cultivate commodity grains, buying into a dream of greater productivity, less labor, and more money.

There were, however, grave consequence associated with the Green Revolution. As prominent eco-feminist and activist Vandana Shiva notes in her work *Stolen Harvest*: “Industrial agriculture ... has destroyed diverse sources of food, and it has stolen food from other species to bring larger quantities of specific commodities to the market, using huge quantities of fossil fuels and water and toxic chemicals in the process.”⁷⁹ Although the Green Revolution produced higher yields of a select few commodity crops, such as wheat and corn, it did so at the expense of biodiversity, which is essential for a strong and resilient ecosystem. In adopting Green Revolution technologies, these farmers unknowingly bought into a system that proved to be less

⁷⁷ Frances Moore Lappé, Joseph Collins, and Peter Rosset, *World Hunger: Twelve Myths*, 2nd ed. (New York: Grove Press, 1998), 58.

⁷⁸ Holt-Giménez et al., *Food Rebellions*, 27.

⁷⁹ Shiva, *Stolen Harvest*, 12.

resilient, less sustainable, more expensive, and ultimately detrimental to their own livelihoods.⁸⁰

As a consequence of the Green Revolution, farmers have become dangerously dependent on multinational agribusiness firms for expensive petro-chemical based fertilizers, toxic herbicides, and pesticides that are needed to strengthen artificially fragile ecosystems. For instance, because inorganic petro-fertilizers so thoroughly deplete the natural minerals within the underlying soil, the land can no longer be cultivated without them, forcing farmers to continue their use.⁸¹ In addition to inorganic fertilizers, the introduction of synthetic herbicides and pesticides has also rendered farmers dependent on these expensive inputs. This is because the increased usage of these herbicides and pesticides has resulted in the unintended creation of “superpests” and “superweeds,” which are pests and weeds that have developed resistance to pesticides and herbicides. These superpests and superweeds have in turn forced farmers to use stronger toxic agrochemicals, making them all the more dependent on agrichemical firms.⁸² This dependence upon these fossil fuel based fertilizers and agrichemicals is extremely damaging to ecosystems. The usage of synthetic fertilizers, herbicides, and pesticides has instead resulted in polluted waterways, degraded soils, salinization, and erosion, all of which exacerbate the effects of global climate change.⁸³

⁸⁰ Holt-Giménez et al., *Food Rebellions*, 24.

⁸¹ Frances Moore Lappé, et al., *Twelve Myths*, 69.

⁸² Shiva, *Stolen Harvest*, 10.

⁸³ Via Campesina, “Sustainable Peasant Agriculture Can Feed the World,” Jakarta, 2010: 3, accessed November 30, 2012, viacampesina.org/en/index.php/publications-mainmenu-30/1017-sustainable-peasant-and-family-farm-agriculture-can-feed-the-world.

The dependence on these inputs has not only degraded the environment, but has also impoverished smallholder farmers throughout the world. Despite its original intent, the Green Revolution became less of a campaign to feed the world, and more of a Trojan horse into the global South, exposing smallholder farmers to industrial agricultural farming practices, including hybrid seeds, petrochemical fertilizers, and expensive machinery.⁸⁴ Given the high cost of these industrial inputs, peasant farmers became trapped in a cycle of debt and dependency, becoming all the more subservient to these multinational agribusiness corporations and increasingly vulnerable to an unpredictable global grain market. Moreover, these former subsistence farmers soon discovered difficulties in selling their commodity crops, as people in the developing world were still too poor to purchase their food, despite the grain surpluses.⁸⁵

The energy crisis in the late 1970s, along with the resulting economic recession in the global North, only sent the developing world into an ever-deeper state of economic crisis. Northern creditors, including the World Bank, wanted their loans repaid just when the value of goods produced in the developing world lost value due to rampant inflation and a global recession.⁸⁶ However, smallholder farmers could not repay their creditors, and consequently went deeper into debt. The high cost of inputs for modern industrial agriculture meant that smallholder farmers who defaulted on their loans had to abandon their farms and their way of life and migrate to the cities, forcing millions of people to urban slums, and effectively giving way to

⁸⁴ Holt-Giménez et al., *Food Rebellions*, 24.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 27.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 36.

the proliferation of large-scale farms in the developing world.⁸⁷ This story is reminiscent of Barrington More's enclosure of the commons and the rise of wool production during the Industrial Revolution in Britain, except on a global scale. But unlike 18th century England, there is currently no industrial revolution to sop up the surplus supply of unskilled labor, leaving millions of unemployed and hungry peasants in urban slums. Over time, this process gave way to the corporate takeover of a newly globalized industrial agricultural system.

In the United States, too, many farmers fled their land to the cities over the course of the 20th century as a similar program of industrialization and corporate consolidation occurred in the US. The 1970s were characterized by a huge expansion of commodity crop production, leading to greater surpluses, increased exports, and the introduction of new types of foods.⁸⁸ In light of the 1973 oil crisis and the concomitant global food crisis, Earl Butz, the presiding US Secretary of Agriculture, reconfigured the farm program of the New Deal era, which had formerly curbed overproduction through subsidization schemes that paid farmers to keep their land out of commission. Butz's new program of expansion urged farmers to plant commodity crops from "fencerow to fencerow" and to put their entire harvest on the market to "save the world from hunger."⁸⁹ This program was also greatly reinforced by

⁸⁷ Philip McMichael, "The World Food Crisis in Historical Perspective," *Agriculture and Food Crisis: Conflict, Resistance, and Renewal* 61, no. 3 (August 2009): 38.

⁸⁸ Gottlieb and Joshi, *Food Justice*, 82.

⁸⁹ Holt-Giménez et al., *Food Rebellions*, 60.

Cold War politics and an anti-communist foreign policy agenda, as food aid was regarded as an essential weapon for combating the spread of communism abroad.

Soon after Butz established his agricultural expansion policy, markets became glutted with commodity crops, and prices plummeted from overproduction in the United States and the developing world. Although there were (and continue to be) millions of malnourished people in the world who would benefit from cheaper food, most of the world's poor were nonetheless still too poor to buy America's excess grain.⁹⁰ Consequently, American farmers struggled to make a living, and many found that they could no longer afford to remain in business. In response, Butz instructed farmers to "get big or get out" and grow themselves out of their economic predicament by increasing the total supply of food.⁹¹ Although Butz's program assured farmers a minimum price for grain through a government backed subsidization scheme, the amount of government support lessened each successive year as economic neoliberalism gained influence in Washington. And as government price supports decreased, the costs of inputs also continued to rise, and then the price of grain plummeted (from oversupply), all of which hurt farmers throughout America.⁹²

American farmers soon discovered that they could no longer sustain a livelihood on farming alone – that is unless they shifted to large-scale monoculture farming practices. As a result, over half of farming families in the US abandoned

⁹⁰ Holt-Giménez et al., *Food Rebellions*, 61.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 61.

⁹² *Ibid.*, 64.

farming as a profession. Since 1960, the number of farms has declined from 3.2 million to 1.9 million, and the average farm size has increased 40% with an 82% increase in productivity.⁹³ The remaining farmers consolidated the leftover land into mega farms, 75 percent of which are now controlled by large-scale corporate farm entities.⁹⁴ The USDA then encouraged policies that gave further rise to non-farm food producers, and ignored the loss of small farms as they were absorbed into corporate holdings. As Earl Butz succinctly remarked, “Farming is no longer a way of life, it is a business.”⁹⁵ Just as the Green Revolution led to the widespread proliferation of industrial agriculture and corporate food industries in the developing world, Butz’s program catalyzed the processes of corporate concentration that gave rise to modern agribusiness in the United States.

Food Aid

Since FDR’s New Deal, the federal government has supported the food stamp program and farm subsidies, buffering food from becoming a complete commodity, subject entirely to the whims of the market place. But beginning in the 1980s under the Reagan administration, the resurgence of neoliberal free-market ideology led to the restriction of many of these New Deal programs, resulting in

⁹³ Nestle, *Food Politics*, 11.

⁹⁴ Robert Hoppe, Penni Korb, Erik O’Donoghue, and David E. Banker, *Structure and Finances of U.S. Farms. Family Farm Report*, USDA (2007), <http://www.ers.usda.gov/publications/eib-economic-information-bulletin/eib24.aspx#.UVrv6cyhBaV>.

⁹⁵ Catherine Lezra and Michael Jacobson, *Food for People Not for Profit* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1975), 10.

policies that tended to favor corporate rather than public interests.⁹⁶ Although the government continued its food aid programs and farm subsidization schemes, it continued to do so increasingly under the tenets of free-market principles and political influence of corporations. And so as public officials stooped to the influence of private market interests, the government in turn indirectly contributed to the complete commodification of food resources that now defines our present food system.

Under the Regan administration, the federal government cut funds and reduced programs for federal food aid programs, greatly adding to the numbers of hungry and homeless. Regan justified these cuts by renouncing “welfare queens” and those who take advantage of what he believed to be an excessively generous welfare system.⁹⁷ As the administration continued to shift funding away from the food stamp program, it still continued to rely on the distribution of surplus commodities for its emergency food system, formally institutionalized in 1983 as the Temporary Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP).⁹⁸ Although TEFAP supplied funding for direct food aid, the system primarily provided tax incentives for food manufacturers and retail markets to donate surplus foods. Dominant agriculture industries embraced the TEFAP program as a way to expand market opportunities with commodity crops. Such measures, in effect, led to the privatization of food aid

⁹⁶ Gottlieb and Joshi, *Food Justice*, 83.

⁹⁷ Gottlieb and Joshi, *Food Justice*, 94.

⁹⁸ Food and Nutrition Service (FNS), “Food Distribution Programs History and Background.”

programs, relying on non-profits and private entities to take over the public food entitlement programs.⁹⁹

TEFAP contributed to the creation of new food banks and soup kitchens, increasing the number of these aid programs by almost twentyfold. These entities distributed over 6.5 billion pounds of surplus food between the years of 1983 and 1990.¹⁰⁰ But such success is exclusively measured in terms of the pounds of food available to these emergency feeding programs, including junk food and candy. This definition of “success” in effect fetishizes food commodities by presuming that a greater availability of food resources necessarily results in enhanced sense of human welfare. This approach fails to consider the number of people who are hungry, the income gap or poverty rates, or even health impacts of these surplus foods. Moreover, this method of emergency food aid patronizes and further stigmatizes individuals for their failure to meet their own individual food needs, rather than looking at access to food as a community responsibility or a fundamentally universal human right.¹⁰¹

Farm Subsidies

In general, the 1980s was an era of free market triumphalism that privileged markets over government programs as a more “efficient” means of allocating resources and advancing human welfare. The USDA, however, largely absolved itself of this

⁹⁹ Gottlieb and Joshi, *Food Justice*, 94.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 95.

free market logic when choosing to continue subsidizing the production of agricultural commodities. During the Farm Bill debates in 1985 and again in 1990, allies of large agribusiness dominated the conversation, resulting in a greater overall emphasis on commodity crop subsidization, production expansion, and export agriculture.¹⁰² The Farm Bill in effect maintained a price floor while expanding markets and subsidizing agribusiness players. These subsidies, however, were not extended to small-scale family farmers, but rather to corporate mega-farms whose interests were tied to those of large corporations such as Monsanto, Syngenta, and Cargill, all of which could afford lobbyists to represent their interests in Washington.¹⁰³ This corporate influence and plutocratic governance reflects an indirect component of the complete commodification of food.

Although food is heavily subsidized and regulated by the US government, it is done through corporate influence and favoritism that indirectly reinforces the complete commodification of the food system.¹⁰⁴ Food subsidies can help ensure sufficient food supplies and the stability of low food prices, but the way they are used today creates an oversupply of grain that has led to a glut in the food commodity market that has in turn driven farmers off their land and bolstered agribusiness.¹⁰⁵ As nutrition scholar Marion Nestle accounts in her work *Food Politics*, the current

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, 83.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁴ Nestle, *Food Politics*, 93.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 19.

subsidization scheme sustains the dominance of an oligopolistic food system, which has brought about the complete commodification of food.¹⁰⁶

Having served as a nutrition policy advisor to the Department of Health and Human Services, as well as a member of the nutrition and science advisory committees of the USDA and Food and Drug Administration (FDA), Nestle accounts how agribusinesses use tremendous amounts of resources to persuade Congress and the administration to continue and increase government subsidies and to ensure policies that are conducive to their interests.¹⁰⁷ According to Nestle, these companies do so primarily through lobbying congress for favorable laws, regulations, and trade agreements. At their best, lobbyists provide officials with well-researched technical advice about legislation, regulation, and public education. This is the ostensible reason for lobbying. But as Nestle emphasizes, lobbyists “are *hired*, not *elected*.”¹⁰⁸ This is an important distinction as lobbyists are paid to represent private rather than public interest. What is concerning about this relationship is the inappropriate crossover of the private sphere into the public realm of food allocation. Through lobbying efforts and campaign donations, the food industry is able to influence congress and obtain laws and rules that act in their favor, often at the expense of public health or consumer interests.¹⁰⁹ Lobbying and related activities in turn raise questions about the undue influence of food industry on public health, as well as the democratic process and our political institutions.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁷ Nestle, *Food Politics*, 93.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 95.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 94.

According to Nestle, lobbying is only one of the more obvious methods of influencing policy; other arrangements exist involving personal connections with legislators or agency officials who might be in a position to promote favorable regulations. In the food industry, job exchanges between lobbyists and the USDA are especially common – as many as 500 agency heads and staff are political appointees chosen on the basis of party affiliation and support.¹¹⁰ The revolving door between corporate agribusiness firms and government agencies including the FDA, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), and the USDA, ensures corporate control over the food system. Due to big agribusiness's political clout in Washington, the food industry has been able to fill the USDA with appointees whose backgrounds are in lobbying, research, or other functions. These appointees have aided large agriculture corporations by implementing policies that favor their bottom line interests. Many of these policies, in turn, compromise the regulatory mission of these agencies.¹¹¹

The food industry seeks both to ensure that no policy impedes their ability to sell more of their products, and also to do as much as possible to foster policies that create a favorable sales environment.¹¹² These corporations do so primarily through personal contacts that have been established through the revolving door appointments, as well as through financial contributions. Such a system excludes voices of those with less money, including small family farmers and growers of non-

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 100.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, 101.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, 110.

commodity food crops. Even if these connections and outcomes are benign, the system is nonetheless undemocratic and remains problematic.¹¹³

Trade Liberalization and Structural Adjustment

While the US retained its subsidies on agricultural commodities, international economic institutes including the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF), fully embraced neoliberal free market philosophy for developing nations.¹¹⁴ During the global recession in the early 1980s, commercial banks were unwilling to extend credit to governments or farmers in the developing world. But when the IMF and World Bank stepped in to “save the day” with the creation of structural adjustment programs that helped defaulting nations out of bankruptcy, they required the borrowing nations to deconstruct their trade barriers. With no other alternative, these nations were forced to accept these conditions. Backed by neoliberal economic principles of the time, these programs blamed government over-spending for the economic crisis, and prescribed liberalization, privatization, currency devaluation, and austerity as the medicine for the economic woes of the Global South.¹¹⁵

By making debt relief contingent upon these structural adjustment programs, the IMF and the World Bank effectively forced the developing world to open their economies to foreign investment and their markets to foreign products. In line with

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, 101.

¹¹⁴ Holt-Giménez et al., *Food Rebellions*, 37.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*

the prevailing free-market ideology of the 1980s, the IMF imposed structural adjustment policies that required the deconstruction of trade barriers and the development of an export agriculture system of commodity cash crops. These policies in turn gave way to international dumping of American subsidized commodity crops by multinational agribusiness corporations (Monsanto, Cargill, ADM etc.), as well as an increased dependency on imported food crops.¹¹⁶ These programs and austerity measures further impoverished the developing world by tying these nations' food security to the whims of the global marketplace and to these corporations.

In addition to these structural adjustments, international trade agreements favoring trade liberalization also largely influenced the corporate takeover of the global food system. Negotiations from the 1986 Uruguay Rounds under the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT), which later became the World Trade Organization (WTO) in 1995, further cemented these duplicitous structural adjustment policies into international treaties.¹¹⁷ In particular, the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), which was established in 1994, proved to be an especially harmful agreement, as Mexican farmers had to compete with cheap subsidized agricultural commodities from the United States with no additional price supports.¹¹⁸ These treaties in effect ensured the global domination of the food system by these multinational agriculture firms by facilitating further expansion of Northern Agribusiness companies and food retailers into new markets.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 44.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 50.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 58.

The IMF-imposed structural adjustments and WTO-imposed trade liberalization transformed largely self-sufficient agriculture nations into import-dependent ones.¹¹⁹ While the IMF imposed structural adjustments required developing countries to cut back on agricultural funding in favor of industrialization, the WTO's compulsory trade liberalization scheme further required these nations, which were once food sufficient, to eliminate quotas on agricultural imports and to open their markets to foreign exports. The import surges of agricultural products from artificially cheapened American food supplies then further dampened agricultural production and research, reinforcing a downward spiral of dependency on a completely commodified global food market.

GMOs as Intellectual Property

Under the auspices of large agribusiness corporations, a new wave of bio-agricultural technology emerged in the 1990s, transforming the way in which the world grows and procures food. Most notably, this transformation gave rise to the proliferation of genetically modified organisms (GMOs). GMOs, also known as transgenic plants, are those in which the genetic material of the plant is altered using genetic engineering techniques.¹²⁰ At the time of its creation, the possibility of such engineering seemed limitless; higher yields, greater resilience to drought, better

¹¹⁹ Walden F. Bello, *The Food Wars* (New York: Verso, 2009), 62.

¹²⁰ *The American Heritage Science Dictionary*, "genetically modified organism," accessed April 08, 2013, http://www.credoreference.com/entry/hmsciencedict/genetically_modified_organism.

flavor, and quicker maturation all became exciting new possibilities. But as new technology emerged, large agribusiness firms patented these techniques, creating a new intellectual-property-right regime for GMO seeds.¹²¹ The creation and patenting of transgenic seeds has resulted in perhaps the most egregious acts of corporate imperialism upon global agriculture.

In 1995, under pressure from multinational agribusiness corporations, the WTO proposed a radical change in international law by ruling that microorganisms and natural processes could be patented.¹²² This ruling meant that a transgenic seed could be patented and privately owned. In 1996, Monsanto developed the first GM crop in America, Roundup Ready Soya, which was then soon followed by GM Roundup Ready corn and soy seeds.¹²³ These seeds offered a single novel trait; they were engineered specifically to resist the toxic effect of Monsanto's own best-selling Roundup Ready herbicide. In developing a gene for herbicide resistance, Monsanto, in effect, established a monopoly in agriculture by providing seeds that were engineered to be resistant to Roundup herbicide as well as a monopoly for the herbicide itself.¹²⁴

Then in 1998, the USDA and Delta and Pine Land Company jointly announced patent permits for a new bio-agricultural technology that allows owners

¹²¹ Shiva, *Stolen Harvest*, 8.

¹²² World Trade Organization (WTO), "Overview of TRIPS Agreement," 1995, accessed April 2, 2013, Article 27.3(b), http://www.wto.org/english/tratop_e/trips_e/intel2_e.htm#patents.

¹²³ "Highlights Throughout the Years," Monsanto, accessed April 2, 2013, <http://www.monsanto.com/weedmanagement/Pages/highlights-throughout-the-years.aspx>.

¹²⁴ Gaia Foundation and the African Biodiversity Network, "Seeds of Freedom," Seeds of Freedom Web site, Vimeo, 15:08, <http://www.seedsoffreedom.info/watch-the-film/watch-the-film-english/> (accessed February 15, 2013).

and licensees to create sterile seeds by selectively programming the plant's DNA to kill its own embryos.¹²⁵ These sterile seeds have disallowed farmers from saving and reusing seeds from year to year, resulting in a system that forces farmers to buy new seeds from a select few corporations every year.¹²⁶ These corporations are also the same ones that control the global agrochemical and herbicides market. The promises of early GMO research remain largely unfulfilled. Instead large agribusiness corporations such as Monsanto dominate the GM market with their own sterile, Roundup Ready seeds. It is a common myth that genetically modified crops reduce the usage of chemical pesticides and herbicides. Instead the most common modification is a tolerance to herbicides, which has in turn created a tenancy system upon which farmers have become increasingly dependent.¹²⁷

Although the industry claims to be increasing yields and feeding the planet, they instead create a cycle of dependency from which farmers cannot escape.¹²⁸ With rising costs of seeds, fertilizers, and pesticides, farmers have become trapped in a spiral of debt. This debt cycle has in turn resulted in a spate of suicides in India by farmers who were unable to maintain their livelihoods through industrial agriculture.¹²⁹ The GM industry maintains that their technologies can relieve the developing world from its backward agricultural practices, and resolve global hunger.

¹²⁵ Melvin John Oliver, Jerry Edwin Quisenberry, Norma Lee Glover Trolinder, and Don Lee Keim, "Control of Plant Gene Expression," 5723765, 1998, <http://www.google.com/patents/US5723765>.

¹²⁶ Shiva, *Stolen Harvest*, 82.

¹²⁷ Gaia Foundation and the African Biodiversity Network, "Seeds of Freedom."

¹²⁸ Frances Moore Lappé, et al., *World Hunger: Twelve Myths*, 75.

¹²⁹ Shiva, *Stolen Harvest*, 10.

Yet, despite these claims, the number of hungry in the world has only increased,¹³⁰ and a series of global food crises have ensued since the time that these agrochemical corporations have introduced GM technologies into the marketplace.

Food System in Crisis

The food system is now in a state of crisis, characterized by skyrocketing prices and global food riots. World food prices increased dramatically in 2007, and again in 2011, creating a global crisis of hunger throughout the world.¹³¹ Although the causes of the recent food price crises are varied, I argue along with Eric Holt-Giménez et al. that the root of these various causal factors lie in a completely commodified food system that has made people everywhere, particularly lower-income individuals, highly vulnerable to an increasingly volatile food market.¹³² In particular, Holt-Giménez et al. point to corporate rent-seeking behaviors and market speculation to explain the onset and severity of these food price crises.

Although adverse climatic conditions, increased meat consumption, and ethanol production have all contributed to the recent rise in food prices, these factors in turn made the food commodity futures market increasingly attractive to speculators. As Holt-Giménez et al. explain, financial speculators were more than

¹³⁰ Frances Moore Lappé, et al., *World Hunger: Twelve Myths*, 61.

¹³¹ Lester R. Brown, "The New Geopolitics of Food," *Foreign Policy Magazine*, May/June 2011, 57.

¹³² "The root causes of the food crises lie in a skewed global food system that has made Southern countries and poor people everywhere highly vulnerable to economic and environmental externalities inherent in food systems that are dominated by a globalized, highly centralized, industrial agrifoods complex." Holt-Giménez et al., *Food Rebellions*, 20.

ready to shift their investments away from equities and mortgage bonds after the 2006 sub-prime mortgage breakdown and the collapse of the financial derivatives market.¹³³ In particular, speculators turned their attention to rice, wheat, corn, and soy commodity future markets, perceiving them as newly profitable and secure markets. As the *New York Times* reports: “This price boom has attracted a torrent of new investment from Wall Street, estimated to be as much as \$300 billion.”¹³⁴ Although there is disagreement regarding the exact degree to which free market speculation of food commodities contributed in the onset of the 2008 food price crisis is widely contested, the FAO nonetheless recognizes that free market speculation of commodities did play a role in the development and severity of the crisis.¹³⁵

Much of the speculation took place in 2008 with little governmental oversight or regulation. After deregulation in the 1980s and the creation of the 2000 Commodities and Futures Modernization Act, banks and commodity traders began to cross over into each other’s markets. While banks began to invest in non-traditional financial instruments, like food commodities, agribusiness firms like Cargill and Archer Daniel’s Midland (ADM) created investment branches. Even traditional venture capital firms like Goldman Sachs became importers of physical food commodities. These crossovers made it difficult to oversee food speculation or

¹³³ Holt-Giménez et al., *Food Rebellions*, 17.

¹³⁴ Diana B. Henriques, “Price Volatility Adds to Worry on U.S. Farms,” *The New York Times*, April 22, 2008, <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/04/22/business/22commodity.html>.

¹³⁵ Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), “State of Food Insecurity in the World 2008,” (2008): 11, <<ftp://ftp.fao.org/docrep/fao/011/i0291e/i0291e00.pdf>.

to prevent crisis in one sector of the economy from spreading into others (as was the case in the sup-prime mortgage breakdown).¹³⁶ Although financial speculation in food commodity markets has occurred in the United States since the 1840s, the total quantity of money that is invested in today's markets is unprecedented. The total holdings of food commodity investors have increased 25 fold over the last 5 years, from \$13 billion in 2003 to \$317 billion as of July 2008.¹³⁷ Food has now become a complete commodity – a financial instrument that is to be bought low and sold high.

Although many are currently starving and experiencing famine throughout the world, the food crisis has made a handful of investors and multinational corporations very rich. The monopolization of the world's food resources has resulted in unprecedented profits and market power by a select few corporations including Cargill, Archer Daniels Midland (ADM), and Monsanto. For example, in the last quarter of 2007, Monsanto's profits more than doubled, ADM profits jumped by 44%, and Cargill's by 86%.¹³⁸ So in addition to adverse climatic conditions and heightened market demand, corporate rent seeking behavior and free market speculation of food commodities contributed to price increases for oil, corn, wheat, and rice across the world, ultimately bringing the food system into crisis.

¹³⁶ Holt-Giménez et al., *Food Rebellions!*, 17.

¹³⁷ M.W. Master and A.K. White, *The Accidental Hunt Brothers: How Institutional Investors Are Driving Up Food And Energy Prices*, 2008, accessed November 18, 2012. www.loe.org/images/content/080919/Act1.pdf.

¹³⁸ Philip McMichael, "The World Food Crisis in Historical Perspective," 43.

Conclusion

Over the course of the last century, food has become completely commodified, aided by subsidization schemes that support oversupply, the development of the Green Revolution, and the imposition of structural adjustment programs and free trade agreements upon developing nations. Thanks to these developments, food is now primarily viewed as a source of profit, the proceeds of which extend beyond the living wages of farmers to fund a globally dominant oligopolistic food empire of large agribusiness corporations. Although farmers and shopkeepers have actively engaged in the cultivation, processing, and market exchange of food resources for quite some time, never before has a food system been one of pure profit maximization, financial speculation, and global empire building, subject to the complete control of plutocrats and corporate CEOs.

With the complete commodification of food resources, markets now oversee both food production and distribution, considering classic economic principles such as profit maximization and economic “efficiency” as the sources of human welfare. This liberal ideology of market freedom and efficiency as the primary mode of enhancing welfare has come to encompass the way in which we regard the food system. Currently, those who govern the food system, from executives at large agribusiness firms, to governmental administrators, and even directors at philanthropic organizations, are all now consumed by neoliberal free market ideology.

Imbued with this outlook, these actors have in turn given rise to big agribusiness and thereby legitimated the complete commodification of the food system.

At base, the injustices of the food system, against which modern food movements protest, are produced by the complete commodification of food resources that has taken place over the course of the last century. The first of these injustices – the distributive injustices – is discussed next in the following chapter on the food justice movement.

Chapter 3: Bread Riots and Food Justice: Distributive Questions

Although the definition of “food justice” varies, the food justice movement ultimately focuses on race and class as well as the disparities in economic, health, environmental and social consequences associated with the prevailing food system. From urban planning projects to discriminatory mortgage lending and land appropriation policies, low-income families and communities of color are routinely subjected to laws and regulations that undermine their ability to manage food resources. Because of these institutionalized laws, marginalized individuals also have less access – both physically and monetarily – to fresh, nutritious, affordable, and culturally appropriate foods. Low-income families and people of color are basically denied access to healthy food due to price and geography. Ultimately, the food justice movement is a racial, economic, and environmental justice project that empowers communities to rectify these injustices and manage their own food system.¹³⁹

In this regard, the food justice movement and bread riots reflect the greater coercive injustices brought about by the pure-commodification of food resources, particularly for lower-income individuals and people of color. As Michael Sandel argues, coercion is a form of injustice when people buy and sell things under conditions of inequality and economic necessity. The seemingly consensual act of purchasing foods is coercive in the sense that these purchases are only made in conditions of inequality and economic necessity. As Sandel explains, markets are not

¹³⁹ Alison Hope Alkon and Julian Agyeman, *Cultivating Food Justice*, ed. Alison Hope Alkon and Julian Agyeman (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2011), 5.

objectionable in themselves, but they can yield injustice when operating in a background of inequality severe enough to create coercive conditions, as is the case in the current completely commodified food system.¹⁴⁰ In this chapter, I argue that the proliferation of food justice movements and bread riots are in response to these coercive conditions, which I identify as distributive injustices. Furthermore, I argue that these distributive injustices are produced by the increasingly complete commodification of the world's food system, and thus cannot be rectified by the completely commodified food system alone.

What is Distributive Justice?

Like the food justice movement itself, the definition of distributive justice is widely contested among ethicists and political philosophers. At base, distributive justice is concerned with the just allocation of goods in a society. But what does a “just allocation” exactly entail?

In this chapter, I argue that the completely commodified food system yields distributive injustice because it exacerbates socio-economic inequality and deprives marginalized individuals of their capability to obtain food that is fresh, healthy, and culturally appropriate – despite its abundance. This understanding of distributive injustice draws upon Amartya Sen's capability theory, in which injustice is understood

¹⁴⁰ Sandel, “What Money Can't Buy,” 94.

as capability deprivation.¹⁴¹ From restricted physical access to food retailers, to exploitative labor practices and exorbitant prices for healthy foods, low-income individuals and communities of color are systematically subject to a coercive and discriminatory food system that yields distributive injustice.

There are, however, competing theories of distributive justice that challenge this contention, including Rawls's liberal theory of distributive justice. Rawls's theory of justice as expressed in his work *Justice as Fairness*, provides a liberal framework of distributive justice that leaves individuals responsible for meeting their own ends, so long as others' basic equal liberties remain intact. In Rawls's scheme, everyone is guaranteed basic rights and liberties that include primary goods, creating a floor of distributive justice. But beyond these basic equal rights, economic and social inequality is permissible so long as exchanges comply with the "difference principle," which asserts that social and economic inequalities are justified if "they are to be the greatest benefit of the least-advantaged members of society (the difference principle)."¹⁴² And so, according to the difference principle, further investment in industrial agriculture and private market expansion of food resources within the completely commodified food system could be regarded as just because it helps increase total food supplies and makes food more affordable. Although this market-oriented approach produces inequalities that disproportionately benefit private investors and corporate CEOs, proponents of a Rawlsian understanding of distributive justice as fairness would nonetheless maintain that outcomes would be

¹⁴¹ Amartya Sen, "Equality of What?" *The Tanner Lectures on Human Values* 1 (1980): 218.

¹⁴² John Rawls, *Justice as Fairness: A Restatement*, ed. Erin Kelly, (Cambridge: Harvard, 2001), 42.

just so long as those who are the worst off in society are made better by the resulting increase in food supplies.

Sen's capability theory and Rawlsian justice as fairness, yield competing theories of distributive justice, and often two very distinct assessments of what a just allocation entails. Sen's capability theory examines the interaction between goods and humans, addressing moral issues of exploitation and discrimination, whereas Rawls's liberal understanding of justice as fairness fetishizes goods and examines the outcome of market interactions with no regard for conditions under which these exchanges are made. In this chapter, I examine the completely commodified food system under both competing frameworks of distributive justice, beginning with Rawls's theory of Justice as Fairness. In doing so, I demonstrate how Sen's capability theory best accounts for the distributive injustices that have since given rise to the proliferation of food justice movements and bread riots.

Rawlsian Justice as Fairness

In applying Rawls's theory of distributive justice to the current food system, the critical question at hand is whether the completely commodified food system benefits the least-advantaged member of society. If so, then the prevailing completely commodified food system could be considered just within this framework. It is commonly argued that all boats rise in the completely commodified food system; a greater supply of food makes it cheaper and more accessible to all, while

simultaneously profiting those corporations and industries who provide the surplus food. Under a Rawlsian framework of distributive justice, this arrangement is just because it complies with the difference principle; even the worst off are bettered by the corporate food system. But this understanding of distributive justice is limited. I argue that the dominant food system does not uphold Rawls's difference principle given that the least-well off populations are in fact made worse-off by the completely commodified food system as it contributes to greater social and economic inequality and generates a coercive market that exploits and discriminates its constituents, particularly lower-income individuals and people of color.

Nonetheless, neoliberals contend that the completely commodified food system is necessary to feed our growing planet. From this perspective, the economic and social inequality that results from the completely commodified food system is merely a justifiable consequence of feeding an ever-growing human population. Census polls show that the world's population has nearly doubled since 1970, and estimates suggest that the count will reach nine billion by 2050.¹⁴³ These estimates further imply that farmers will need to feed up to 80 million additional people annually to meet the demands of the world's growing population. The practicalities associated with feeding the world's growing population are without doubt of great importance. If humanity is currently incapable of feeding a population of seven billion properly, then how can it reasonably feed the expected nine billion in 2050? In response to this question, *The Economist's* issue on "Feeding the World," claims

¹⁴³ *The Economist*, "The 9 billion-people question."

that agricultural productivity must increase and food markets must be privatized in the developing world in order to accommodate the world's growing population and rising food demands.¹⁴⁴

According to these modern day Malthusians, the rapid increase of world food prices is primarily caused by two factors: accelerated growth in demand, and increased difficulty of expanding production to sufficient levels. The Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) asserts that the structural trends underlying growth in demand, such as rapid population growth, increased ethanol reliance, and changed diets, have met the limitations of current food supplies. These factors are further compounded by inclement weather events including flooding and drought, which have both resulted in production shortfalls.¹⁴⁵ Thus, the relatively recent onset and high frequency of food movements and riots suggests that the world has reached the Malthusian point at which growth in demand for food has outstripped growth in supply. From this perspective, further investment in industrial agriculture and private market expansion of food resources could be considered as an appropriate remedy for the inefficiencies that define our current food system. If the question at hand is one of supply and demand, then the solution is simple: increase the supply of food with industrial farming techniques and place food on the free market to ensure that food prices are low.

¹⁴⁴ "The Future of Food: Crisis Prevention," *The Economist*, Feb. 24 2011, accessed on May 5, 2012, <http://www.economist.com/node/18229412/print>.

¹⁴⁵ FAO, *State of Food Insecurity in the World 2008*, 9.

Given this line of reasoning, many neo-Malthusians, including former president of the World Bank Robert Zoellick, suggest that rich countries ought to finance another Green Revolution to increase farm productivity and raise crop yields in the developing world.¹⁴⁶ Many international development agencies, food companies, and plant breeders consider the Green Revolution a success. After all, the program more than doubled food production yields. In 20 years, from 1970 to 1990, the total food available per person increased by 11% and the estimated number of hungry fell from 942 million to 786 million – a 16% drop – worldwide.¹⁴⁷ So although the completely commodified food system greatly benefits big agribusiness and the food industry, it nonetheless results in an overall trend of increased yields, which arguably benefits everyone including the least-advantaged members of society. The more food that is produced, the cheaper and more widely available food becomes, making it more accessible for all, and thus upholding Rawls's difference principle. With this outlook, it can be concluded that the completely commodified food system is in fact “just” within a Rawlsian framework of justice, as it results in a net-benefit for humanity. Given this conclusion, the most appropriate response to recent bread riots and justice movements would be a policy of increased industrialization and market privatization to further reduce food prices and extend availability of food resources.

But even though the Green Revolution initially increased yields, the number of hungry increased by 9% in Mexico and South Asia. With the exception of China,

¹⁴⁶ “The World Food Crisis,” *The New York Times*, April 10, 2008, accessed May 13, 2012, http://www.nytimes.com/2008/04/10/opinion/10thu1.html?_r=1.

¹⁴⁷ Frances Moore Lappé, et al., *World Hunger: Twelve Myths*, 61.

where the number of hungry dropped from 405 to 189 million (which was likely due to the end of the cultural revolution), the number of hungry people increased by more than 11% worldwide.¹⁴⁸ Moreover, when Green Revolution technologies stagnated in the 1990s, cereal yield growth declined,¹⁴⁹ and the number of hungry individuals climbed to over 1 billion.¹⁵⁰ Hunger resurged because the roots of most recent food crises stem not from a production shortage or a scarcity issue, but poverty.¹⁵¹

In this regard, there are certain limitations to Rawls's theory of distributive justice in its applicability to the present food crisis. As previously addressed, liberal ideologies such as Rawls's theory of justice, fetishize goods as a source of freedom and welfare unto themselves. In his scheme of basic rights and liberties, Rawls's theory of justice includes his notion of "primary goods," which are goods in which every rational human is presumed to want, including rights, liberties and opportunities, income and wealth, and self-respect. But with this understanding, Rawls assumes that the mere *acquisition* of primary social goods – such as food – incurs advantage. This belief that the possession alone yields freedom and well-being, irrespective of one's capability to use them, in effect fetishizes these goods. This sort of commodity fetishism is further accompanied with a more-is-better attitude, the assumption that an ever-expanding pie is always better irrespective of how the pie is distributed amongst members of society. In this regard, Rawls's justice as fairness remains limited in that it privileges

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁹ World Bank, *The CGIAR at 31: An Independent Meta-Evaluation of the Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research*, (Washington DC: The World Bank, 2003), 70, [Inweb90.worldbank.org/oed/oeddoelib.nsf/.../cgiar_wp_eich_ruki.pdf](http://web90.worldbank.org/oed/oeddoelib.nsf/.../cgiar_wp_eich_ruki.pdf).

¹⁵⁰ FAO "FAO Hunger Portal," accessed April 4, 2013, <http://www.fao.org/hunger/en/>.

¹⁵¹ Holt-Giménez et al., *Food Rebellions*, 24.

the liberty at the expense of equality – or rather the relative size of pie slices respective to one another. This is problematic because in privileging liberty, Rawls’s theory of distributive justice fails to adequately address moral considerations of exploitation and capability deprivation that often accompany social and economic inequality.¹⁵²

Rawls justifies this lack of consideration for exploitation and discrimination by asserting an assumed condition of basic equality. In *Justice as Fairness*, Rawls’s thought experiment asks us to imagine a veil of ignorance in a hypothetical original position wherein individuals are supposed to select principles that determine the basic structure of society without the knowledge of their own particular station in the society, forcing participants to select principles impartially and rationally. From this original position, Rawls asserts that rational individuals would agree upon the first principle of “justice as fairness,” which states that each individual has the right to basic rights and liberties broadly conceived.¹⁵³ But even though the first of Rawls’s principles in “Justice as Fairness” asserts that rational individuals would agree upon basic equality of rights and liberties in the original position, behind a veil of ignorance, this is a theoretical assumption that is unproven for real-world application. One cannot assume the universal desire for basic equality, as there are always socially constructed and physical differences among humans that bias our sense of fairness.¹⁵⁴ Consequently, a theory of distributive justice predicated on such assumptions must be regarded as weak at best.

¹⁵² Sen, “Equality of What?,” 216.

¹⁵³ Rawls, *Justice as Fairness*.

¹⁵⁴ Sen, “Equality of What?,” 216.

The completely commodified food system has in fact contributed to greater social and economic inequality. This has resulted in coercive food markets and consequently distributive injustice. Now, it may still seem inappropriate to hold the complete commodification of food resources responsible for the ails of our food system, including the emergence of food deserts, the obesity epidemic, the perpetuation of global food insecurity, and persistence of hunger. After all, profit driven biotechnology firms have increased food supplies, and large food retailers have helped lower food prices. But the complete commodification of the food system nonetheless results in distributive injustice as it merely exacerbates social and economic inequality, resulting in a coercive food market that has now deprived lower income individuals and people of color of their ability to obtain fresh, nutritious, and culturally appropriate food – despite food surpluses. Such coercion can be seen in both the proliferation of genetically modified organisms (GMOs) as well as the exploitative labor practices of large superstores, such as Wal-Mart. In this regard, more is not necessarily better when it is accompanied with a socially and ecologically exploitative system of production and distribution.

Genetically Modified Organisms and a New Green Revolution

Global agrichemical corporations declare that without their patented products, the world's food needs cannot be met. Although the surrounding rhetoric behind a New Green Revolution claims that GM technology enhances food security

by increasing yields, it is in actuality an ineffective strategy for tackling the underlying political and economic roots of food insecurity: poverty and inequality. As addressed in chapter 2, the Green Revolution and GM technologies do not address lack of access to land, water, training, credit, markets and other goods and services, that would allow poor individuals and communities to afford the food they grow. The Green Revolution and GM technologies instead tie farmers to an expensive technology-based strategy that exacerbates social and economic inequities, thereby further entrenching communities in a coercive and unsustainable completely commodified food system.

Moreover, these technologies have failed to produce more of the foods that people actually eat. Although the Green revolution and GM technologies have contributed to higher yields of a select few commodity cash crops, such as coffee, sugar, cotton, wheat, and corn, they have done so at the expense of biodiversity, which is critical for a sustainable and resilient ecosystem as well as a diverse diet. With the Green Revolution and the rise of GM technologies, the production of nitrogen-fixing legumes, fruits, and vegetables disappeared from newly industrialized farms, as these non-commodity crops were deemed “inefficient” to produce on an industrial scale. Although the Green Revolution and GM technologies have resulted in higher yields of commodity grains and cash crops, they have also destroyed ecosystems and failed to produce more of the foods that humans actually eat.

For these reasons, a new Green Revolution and GM technology cannot feed the planet, as they merely result in an industrial system of agriculture that destroys

farmlands and threatens the livelihoods of peasant farmers throughout the world, impacting the least well-off populations to a much greater extent. In this regard, more food and greater yields ceases to be of value when it is accompanied by a socially and ecologically exploitative food system that fails to produce foods that people actually eat, and further impoverishes those it allegedly services.

Wal-Mart

In addition to GM technology, many proponents of the current food system advocate further investment in large chain retailers such as Wal-Mart, with the hopes of providing consumers with more affordable food through markets of scale.

Although superstore retailers such as Wal-Mart arguably make food more accessible to the public, both physically and monetarily, they nonetheless contribute to the structural forces that generate endemic poverty, which in turn prevent individuals from accessing fresh, nutritious, culturally appropriate foodstuffs.

In January 2011, Wal-Mart teamed with Michelle Obama's Let's Move Campaign, and committed to make its food healthier and more affordable. The corporation announced its plan to pressure suppliers into lowering the salt, fat, and sugar content in thousands of products and to reduce prices for healthier items.¹⁵⁵

Additionally, Wal-Mart pledged to move into urban areas with few food retailers,

¹⁵⁵ Sheryl Gay Stolberg, "Wal-Mart Plans to Make Its House Brand Healthier," *The New York Times*, January 20, 2011, accessed February 20, 2013, <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/01/20/business/20walmart.html>.

giving millions of Americans access to their stores. Moreover, Wal-Mart has pledged 1.2 billion pounds of food and \$250 million of aid over the course of 5 years to anti-hunger organizations, including mostly food banks and pantries.¹⁵⁶ These acts of charity, however, are not entirely without costs. As Andy Fisher, co-founder and former executive director of the Community Food Security Coalition writes: “because its core business model keeps its workers in poverty, on food stamps and receiving charity, Wal-Mart is a hunger-creating company, not a hunger-fighting company, as its publicity would have us believe.”¹⁵⁷ Although Wal-Mart’s philanthropic actions are not alone problematic, the duplicitous nature of these actions, which are a result of its exploitative business model, makes its strategic philanthropic program objectionable.

Wal-Mart’s business model is greatly dependent on the food stamp (SNAP) program. According to the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, nearly 85 percent of SNAP benefits are redeemed at supermarkets or superstores like Wal-Mart.¹⁵⁸ But in addition to this revenue stream, Wal-Mart is also greatly dependent on the SNAP program for supplementing its employees’ income.¹⁵⁹ Wal-Mart is well known for paying its workers low wages and disallowing employees from working enough hours to qualify for health insurance and other benefits. In some stores, up to 80 percent of

¹⁵⁶ “Walmart Commits \$2 Billion to Help End Hunger in the U.S.,” *Wal-Mart Corporate*, accessed April 3, 2013, <http://news.walmart.com/news-archive/2010/05/12/walmart-commits-2-billion-to-help-end-hunger-in-the-us>.

¹⁵⁷ Andy Fisher, “Fighting Hunger or Causing Hunger: A Mid-term Look at Wal-Mart’s \$2 Billion Commitment,” *Civil Eats Blog*, accessed January 15, 2013, <http://civileats.com/2013/01/10/fighting-hunger-or-causing-hunger-a-mid-term-look-at-wal-marts-2-billion-commitment/>.

¹⁵⁸ “Policy Basics: Introduction to the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP),” *Center on Budget and Policy Priorities*, accessed April 8, 2013, <http://www.cbpp.org/cms/index.cfm?fa=view&tid=2226>.

¹⁵⁹ Alice Hines and Christina Wilkie, “Walmart’s Internal Compensation Documents Reveal Systematic Limit On Advancement,” *Huffington Post*, November 16, 2012, accessed February 15, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/11/16/walmarts-internal-compensation-plan_n_2145086.html.

Wal-Mart workers receive SNAP benefits, allowing the company to continue its exploitative practices.¹⁶⁰ According to independent market research firm Ibis World, the wage of an entry-level Wal-Mart employee averages around \$8.81 an hour, which translates to an annual pay of \$15,576 based on Wal-Mart's full-time status of 34 hours a week.¹⁶¹ This figure is significantly below the 2010 federal poverty level of \$22,050 for a family of four.

Cheaper food ceases to be of virtue when it is accompanied with exploitative employers and a coercive marketplace. In this regard, Wal-Mart is not a solution to the lack of grocery stores in low-income neighborhoods or to the nations' obesity epidemic. Instead, Wal-Mart's entrance into communities merely impoverishes the local economy, creating greater economic inequality, and furthering a cycle of dependency upon charity and the corporation. This loss of access to nutritious, fresh and culturally appropriate food results in a distributive injustice that has now fueled the food justice movement.

Amartya Sen's Capability Approach and Entitlement Failures

In contrast to Rawls's theory of distributive justice, Sen's capability theory successfully addresses moral issues of discrimination and exploitation, as both

¹⁶⁰ "Fact Sheet Wages," *Making Change at Walmart*, accessed April 3, 2013, <http://makingchangeatwalmart.org/factsheet/walmart-watch-fact-sheets/fact-sheet-wages/>.

¹⁶¹ Harry Bradford, "Walmart CEO Mike Duke: 'We Do Pay Competitive Wages,'" *Huffington Post*, December 12, 2012, accessed February 15, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/12/12/walmart-ceo-mike-duke_n_2286440.html.

conditions inhibit one's ability to act as an equal in society.¹⁶² The central measure of justice in Sen's capability approach is not how much people possess, but rather whether they have the capability to lead a fully functioning life. In Sen's terms, this is the ability to transform goods into functionings. In this regard, Sen's approach looks beyond the total amount of goods that are available for consumption – the size of the proverbial pie – to examine opportunities for functioning, referring to various doings and beings. Although Sen's capability theory includes considerations of income, this is not its exclusive focus. Instead, Sen focuses on what income does for people, what it allows them to do. For instance, a marginalized member of society, whether due to class, race, or health standing, may be able to earn the same income as an otherwise privileged individual, but may still not have the same capabilities to use this income due to historically/socially produced barriers or physical/mental impairments.¹⁶³

In this regard, Sen's interpretation of distributive justice, with his focus on capabilities, takes into account the existing non-ideal society, which includes disabilities, special health considerations, mental health handicaps, and historical/socially produced inequalities. In a world of historical, sociocultural, and physical differences, it is presumptuous to assume that everyone has access to the same opportunities, as is assumed by Rawls's first principle in *Justice as Fairness*. Although Rawls asserts basic equality of rights and liberties among members of society from the original position in his theory of distributive justice, it is nonetheless impossible to prove that decisions made in Rawls's original position behind a veil of

¹⁶² Sen, "Equality of What?" 217.

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*, 219.

ignorance would result in equal opportunity or the mutual recognition of others' basic liberties or rights (which are subjective concepts in their own right).

This rejection of the complete commodification of food and the Rawls's liberal theory of justice as fairness, however, should not be understood as a call for absolute distributional equality. Few would find a Soviet style of collective farming particularly comforting, and most would likely object to having food resources distributed exclusively by the state. Such a proposal would likely receive the same negative public response as Supreme Court Justice Anton Scalia's "broccoli mandate," which he mockingly proposed to illustrate loss of fundamental American freedom of choice that might occur with President Obama's healthcare mandate.¹⁶⁴ Moreover, it is far from clear that giving equal weight to equal interest of all parties, irrespective of the other, would result in an optimal outcome. Given the diversity within humanity, such an absolutist egalitarian approach would fail to account for people's objective position, whether they are hungry, cold, or oppressed. The food needs of a pregnant woman versus an elderly man or young children are considerably varied.¹⁶⁵ For these reasons, I am not an advocate of an absolutist egalitarian approach to food distribution. Instead, I appeal to Sen's capability theory, which strives for equality in terms of basic capabilities. According to Sen's capability approach, a just society is one that allows all members of society, regardless of race, class, or physical/mental endowments, the means and opportunities to meet their needs, (nutritional, clothing power to

¹⁶⁴ James B. Stewart, "How Broccoli Became a Symbol in the Health Care Debate," *The New York Times*, June 13, 2012, <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/06/14/business/how-broccoli-became-a-symbol-in-the-health-care-debate.html>.

¹⁶⁵ Sen, "Equality of What?" 212.

participate in social life etc.). From this standpoint, public resources should be devoted to removing or substantially reducing social barriers and physical handicaps so that all members of society can pursue socially necessary goods, opportunities, wealth, and income.¹⁶⁶

There are arguably limitations to Sen's capability theory. For example, it is notably difficult to make interpersonal comparisons of utility that accord with the implicit diversity that exists in humanity. According to Sen, such comparisons are possible, but they must be made on the basis of a broad uniformity of personal preferences that is determined by a plurality,¹⁶⁷ which implies a system of democracy. Similar to those objections against Wazler's pluralistic conception of justice in his *Spheres of Justice*, Sen admits that his capability theory remains largely culturally contingent, and recognizes the legitimate criticism that is warranted with any attempt to create a list of capabilities that claims to be universal. Consequently, Sen remains broad in defining his notion of basic functionings and merely wishes to contextualize a plural definition for basic capabilities. But as established previously in Chapter One, this thesis assumes that access to food is a universal human capability with clear distributive principles, the violation of which results in injustice. And in fact, much of Sen's work further affirms this assumption.

Unlike many of the theorists and philosophers who discuss the ethics of commodification and markets, Amartya Sen directly discusses ethical considerations associated with food distribution, many of which suggest that access to food ought to

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 218.

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 219.

be regarded as a fundamentally universal human capability. In his critically acclaimed work: *Poverty and Famines: An Essay on Entitlement and Deprivation*, Sen states that contrary to popular belief, most famines are not created by food shortages. Harvest failures, trade reductions, and droughts often contribute to food shortages, but far more influential are the political and market structures that determine financial markets and how food is distributed. According to Sen, an absolute scarcity of food supplies is extraordinarily rare.¹⁶⁸

Following Sen's claim, the increase in food supply has been comparable to or greater than population growth in most areas of the world. According to the FAO, there were record grain harvests in 2007, supplying 2.114 billion tons of grain – more than enough to feed the world.¹⁶⁹ Additionally, total factor productivity growth in world agriculture – a measure that indicates long-term technological progress – has been steadily increasing at 1.4% a year,¹⁷⁰ while population growth has slumped to 1.2% a year, well below the rate of growth for agriculture output.¹⁷¹ In the US, food supply of calories has increased by 1,700 calories in 20 years, from 3,2000 in 1970 to 3,900 in 1990s. This quantity is twice the amount needed to meet the energy consumption for most women, and 1/3 more than most men, and much higher than what is needed for

¹⁶⁸ Amartya Sen, *Poverty and Famines: An Essay on Entitlement and Deprivation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983), 7.

¹⁶⁹ Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), *Crop Prospects and Food Situation* No. 5, Rome, October 2007, accessed April 3, 2012, 5, <http://www.fao.org/docrep/010/ah873e/ah873e00.htm>.

¹⁷⁰ "How Much Is Enough?" *The Economist*, February 24, 2011, accessed February 20, 2013, <http://www.economist.com/node/18200702>.

¹⁷¹ "World Development Indicators," *Google Public Data Explorer*, using data from the World Bank, last modified January 17, 2013, https://www.google.com/publicdata/explore?ds=d5bnecppjof8f9_&met_y=sp_pop_grow&tdim=true&dl=en&hl=en&q=global%20population%20growth.

infants, children, and the sedentary elderly.¹⁷² Furthermore, the FAO reports that about one-third of edible foods that are produced for human consumption are lost or wasted globally, which amounts to around 1.3 billion tons of food annually.¹⁷³ Consequently, absolute food shortages are truly rare, just as Amartya Sen claims. Instead, it is vastly more common for an adequate supply of food to be beyond the reach of those who need it most due to poverty. As a recent World Food Program reports, over 90% of the world's hungry are too poor to buy food. According to the FAO's 2008 State of Food Insecurity Report "The relative share of food crises caused by socio-economic factors has risen in the past three decades from about 2 percent in the 1980s to 11 percent in the 1990s and 27 percent since 2000."¹⁷⁴ In this regard, the FAO's report further affirms Sen's claim, and suggests that his assertions are perhaps more relevant today than ever before. Although there is enough food to feed every individual on the planet twice over, this fact does not prove that hunger is being eliminated since starvation is a function of an individual's ability to procure food, rather than one of supply and demand.

With this understanding of food crises, Sen advocates a shift in focus away from questions of food production and availability to those of food access and distribution. Sen's understanding of endemic starvation begins with his notion of "exchange entitlements," the formal definition of which includes the set of all alternative bundles of commodities that one can acquire in exchange for what one

¹⁷² Nestle, *Food Politics*, 13.

¹⁷³ Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), "Global Food Losses and Food Waste," (2011), 4, <http://www.fao.org/docrep/014/mbo60e/mbo60e00.htm>.

¹⁷⁴ FAO, *The State of Food Insecurity in the World 2008*, 20.

owns.¹⁷⁵ Sen views his entitlement approach as a natural extension to Rawls's notion of primary goods, but with a non-fetishized outlook on goods, focusing on what goods allow people to do – make them capable of accomplishing.¹⁷⁶ Exchange entitlements can be understood as income from the wages earned from an occupation, crop or livestock raised, gifts, donations, investments and inheritance, as well as non-monetary natural endowments, such as an individual's health or class standing. With this definition of exchange entitlements, food crises can then be understood as occurrences in which a large subsection of the population in any given region loses the capability, or “exchange entitlements,” to access necessary commodities, such as food.

Entitlement Failures and Food Desertification

In the case of the present food system, I argue that the complete commodification of food has contributed to a series of “entitlement failures,” which have informed the rise of food justice movements and bread riots. With the rise of neoliberalism, the increasingly globalized and market driven economy has given rise to greater economic inequality worldwide, resulting in widespread entitlement failures. These entitlement failures have in turn deprived lower-income and marginalized populations of the full capability to purchase foods that are fresh, healthy, or culturally appropriate. Instead these individuals are coerced into purchasing unhealthy foods that are physically and monetarily available to them. Thus

¹⁷⁵ Sen, *Poverty and Famines: An Essay on Entitlement and Deprivation*, 3.

¹⁷⁶ Sen, “Equality of What?” 219.

the complete commodification of food resources has resulted in a coercive and exploitative food system that produces entitlement failures and thereby distributive injustice.

Because of the pricing dynamic within the completely commodified food system, many people are only able to make food purchases from a limited set of often unhealthy and highly processed items. Although modern grocery markets and super stores provide what seemingly appears to be an endless array of food, aisle after aisle contain reconfigured corn and soy products, this abundance is merely an illusory sense of prosperity. Currently, the federal government (under the influence of corporate lobbyists) most heavily subsidizes corn and soy production, further cheapening products that are made from these commodity crops.¹⁷⁷ These highly processed products also tend to be those with the least nutritional value, including chips, crackers, candy, and soda, all of which are the least expensive products at food markets.¹⁷⁸ In addition to monetary considerations, people's food purchases are further limited because cooking takes time and knowledge, which many lower-income class families do not have.¹⁷⁹ Given these constraints many families are coerced into buying inexpensive processed and fast foods because they cannot afford to eat any other way.

In addition to these barriers, physical access to adequate grocery stores and healthy fresh food is yet another difficulty for many low-income families and people of

¹⁷⁷ Nestle, *Food Politics*, 19.

¹⁷⁸ Anju Aggarwal, Pablo Monsivais, and Adam Drewnowski, "Nutrient Intakes Linked to Better Health Outcomes Are Associated with Higher Diet Costs in the US," *PLoS ONE* 7, no. 5 (May 25, 2012): e37533, doi:10.1371/journal.pone.0037533.

¹⁷⁹, Robert, and Joshi. *Food Justice*, 63.

color. Districts with restricted access to large grocery stores are commonly known as “food deserts.”¹⁸⁰ Food deserts are districts, commonly urban areas, with few or no grocery stores offering fresh and affordable foods. Similarly, “food swamps” are areas in which there are still few grocery stores, but have high densities of fast food chains and convenience stores that provide food of poorer nutritional quality and at higher prices.¹⁸¹ Physical access to grocery stores that provide healthy food is difficult when markets are distant and when shoppers do not have access to a car, as is the case for many low-income families, and when public transportation is expensive or cumbersome to use. For many living in food deserts and food swamps, convenience stores and fast food restaurants that serve relatively expensive and unhealthy foods are the most readily accessible food retailers. The shift to current patterns of supermarkets in wealthier communities and the creation of food deserts in low-income neighborhoods is largely due to various social and economic trends, which include middle-class/white flight from urban areas as well as policies and economic development patterns that have favored corporations’ interests rather than those of community members.¹⁸² These trends have further institutionalized social and economic inequality, cementing the inequitable conditions that yield coercive and exploitative food markets.

¹⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 40.

¹⁸¹ Jane Black, “Food Deserts vs. Swamps: The USDA Weighs In,” *Washington Post: All We Can Eat*, June 25, 2009, accessed March 1, 2013, <http://voices.washingtonpost.com/all-we-can-eat/food-politics/food-deserts-vs-swamps-the-usd.html>.

¹⁸² *Ibid.*, 43.

And so, for many of those around the world who lack the capability to access healthy food, whether socially, monetarily, or physically, the present food system is in effect a coercive and exploitative enterprise that discriminates marginalized populations, typically lower-income families and communities of color. For these reasons Sen's capability approach and entitlement theory offers a more comprehensive understanding of food crises as the result of entitlement failures.

Conclusion

Despite common belief, there is plenty of food in the world; it is just not reaching the hands of those who need it due to heightened social and economic inequality and resultant entitlement failures. Instead, the world's food surpluses go towards feeding our automobiles and cattle rather than people, and even then much of it goes to waste. The onset of food justice movements and bread riots consequently must be understood as a reflection of widespread entitlement failure, which is in turn due to a neoliberal political economic order and a coercive completely commodified food system. Corporations such as Wal-Mart and Monsanto are not the solution, as they further exacerbate the problem of entitlement failure and coercion. In this regard, the completely commodified food system ought to be understood as the *cause* of food insecurity, not the solution. In order to combat hunger and malnutrition, policymakers must instead look at the structural forces that bring poverty and

inequality. What good is increasing yields and more efficient agriculture techniques if it isn't justly distributed?

But even if corporations were able to establish basic capability equality throughout the world, and there was no coercion within the food markets, the industrial food system would nonetheless still result in injustice as it corrupts the intrinsic social and cultural worth of foods. This form of injustice – recognitional injustices – is the topic of discussion in the following chapter on the food justice movement.

Chapter 4 “Gastro-Anomie”: Corruption in the Spirit and Quality of Food

Within the last few decades, local food movements and the organic food craze have captured the attention of many concerned food consumers. In the United States, this trend has given rise to thousands of community-supported (CSA) programs and farmers’ markets as well as booming organic food sales. Local food movements have been cropping up around the world with unprecedented frequency as well.

International groups such as the Italian based Slow Food Movement and the Terra Madre Network reflect the growing global trend of local and sustainable food advocacy. In this chapter, I explain the explosive onset of the local, slow, and organic food movements by illustrating how and why people across the world are becoming dissatisfied with the *corruptive* nature of the complete commodification of food resources. Here, I argue that advocates of these movements strive to counter the corruption of food resources by preserving traditional food systems, quality, and safety of food resources, and by encouraging agricultural practices that favor the conservation of local ecosystems.

As Sandel explains, markets become corrupt when the complete commodification of a given good or service degrades the intrinsic worth of the product. The argument for corruption stems from the moral importance and intrinsic character of goods, when the commodification erodes the sanctity of the good in question. Unlike the coercion-based argument, which objects to commodification on the grounds of

background conditions of inequality, corruption can occur in conditions of equality as well as and is intrinsic to the complete commodification of any good or service with social meaning. In instances where food is completely commodified, market norms overtake the traditional culinary systems without regard for existing cultural norms and standards, resulting in *corruptive* institutions.¹⁸³ In this respect, the complete commodification of food resources has led to the physical degradation of food products and the related disintegration of food cultures and community. Due to the process of complete commodification, the modern food system has now come to be physically and metaphysically corrupted.

Both of these forms of corruption, physical and metaphysical, correspond to what I identify as the two distinct but linked motivations for the slow, local, and organic food movement. I argue that the growing concern for food safety and health within the industrial food system and increased interest in organics is largely related to fundamental anxieties associated with the physical corruption of food, whereas the emerging desire for local and slow food production and consumption is in large part motivated by the metaphysical corruption of commodified foods. These are not entirely distinct motivations or movements, however, as they are interrelated responses to the rise of the complete commodification of the food system, and in particular the associated *corruption* of food and culture.

Traditional culinary practices and agricultural systems once protected against both the physical and metaphysical corruption of food. But with the processes of

¹⁸³ Sandel, "What Money Can't Buy," 94.

complete commodification, the intrinsic worth of food and food cultures has gone unrecognized, subjugated instead by market norms, resulting in a form of recognitional injustice. This lack of recognition of traditional food cultures and forms of agriculture has in turn *corrupted* our food system, resulting in a sea of processed junk foods and an unjust, involuntary sense of normlessness that the completely commodified food system alone cannot rectify. At base, it is to these recognitional injustices to which the slow, organic, and local food movements protest.

The Omnivore's Dilemma and the Physical Corruption of Food

This section shows how the physical corruption of food associated with the complete commodification of the food system is a tangible motivator for local and organic food movements, particularly in the industrial world. Driven by the profit motive, the complete commodification of food has led to inferior food quality, both in terms of hygiene as well as nutritional worth. As food becomes further commodified and industrially processed, produced and prepared further from the home, people (particularly middle-class Americans) have become increasingly distrustful of the safety and healthfulness of their food. Here I argue that as people's preoccupation with food safety and health concerns have increased, so has their interest in alternative forms of agriculture. Yet, consumers are nonetheless dependent on the completely commodified food system, and thus continue to rely on food marketers, corrupt governmental dietary guidelines, and the media for advice on what to eat. In this

section, I explain how this phenomenon has in turn reinforced a nutritional industrial complex in which only the food industry profits.

Because food literally makes up our physical beings, the act of eating is fraught with potentially irreversible consequences for one's health and even life.

Consequently, the ability to judge the safety and healthfulness of foods is important as an instinct of self-preservation. The ability to identify foods for consumption is fundamentally tied to the formation of our biological selves.¹⁸⁴ After all, as the common adage goes: "you are what you eat." The food we eat is not only the energy our body consumes, it becomes the body's very substance. In his essay "Food, Self, and Identity," French sociologist Claude Fischler refers to humans' fundamental ambivalence and anxiety towards food, and in particular, its safety, as the "omnivore's paradox."¹⁸⁵

Over thirty years ago, well before Michael Pollan's popular book *The Omnivores' Dilemma*, professor of psychology Paul Rozin coined the term "omnivore's dilemma" to refer to the moral and physical hazards posed by humanity's ability to eat anything.¹⁸⁶ Given that some food can kill us, it is consequently a source of great anxiety among human omnivores. On the one hand, omnivory implies a certain degree of liberty as evidenced by the wide variety of diets across humanity. This is beneficial because humans crave variety, and are inclined towards

¹⁸⁴ Claude Fischler, "Food, Self and Identity," *Social Science Information* 27, no. 2 (June 1, 1988): 280, doi:10.1177/053901888027002005.

¹⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁶ Paul Rozin, "The Selection of Foods by Rats," *Advances in the Study of Behavior* 6 (New York: Academic Press, 1976), 21.

diversification, exploration, and change. But on the other hand, this liberty also implies a certain kind of constraint given that humans need at minimum some variety in their diets. Unlike a koala bear, which only eats eucalyptus leaves, humans require a wide range of foods to subsist. But omnivores must also be somewhat conservative about what they eat given that unknown foods hold potential danger. The tension between the liberty and safety results in a contradiction – a paradox, which has come to preoccupy human omnivores throughout history.¹⁸⁷

Nowadays, people are not so much preoccupied with the safety of eating strange plants they encounter in the wild, but rather with food safety and health considerations associated with how their food is being produced and processed. As prominent food historian Harvey Levenstein identifies in his recent book, *Fear of Food*, these newfound anxieties are a natural consequence of a capitalist and industrialized market economy. Over the course of the last century, the complete commodification of food has completely changed how food is grown, transported, processed, and distributed. In the present completely commodified food system, food passes through the hands of middlemen who all stand to profit by cutting corners during processing, compromising the quality and the safety of processed food products.¹⁸⁸ In effect, the complete commodification of food has physically *corrupted* modern foods, resulting in food scares and food-related anxieties. I argue that these fears are in large part due to the complete commodification of our food system in

¹⁸⁷ Fischler, “Food, Self and Identity,” 278.

¹⁸⁸ Levenstien, *Fear of Food: A History of Why We Worry About What We Eat* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012), 1.

which the profit motive incentivizes careless modes of food production and overly sensationalized media driven panics.

Perhaps most prominent of these scares includes the recent spates of *Salmonella* and *E. coli* poisoning from consuming contaminated animal-products, and increasingly produce and even peanut butter.¹⁸⁹ *Salmonella* and *E. coli* are both foodborne pathogens that can lead to illness if contaminated fecal matter comes into contact with food. Poultry is the food most commonly associated with *salmonella* outbreaks, whereas *E. coli* bacteria are typically found in ground meat products. Both pathogens, however, are linked to the standard grain based diets, as well as the factory farm conditions, in which cattle and poultry are raised. Grain-based feeds can encourage the growth of dangerous *E. coli* bacteria in a cow's stomach, unlike grass-based diets, which eliminates the potential development of these dangerous pathogens. Moreover, livestock and chickens raised in factory farms are often packed tightly into feedlots, where animals stand in pools of manure, allowing foodborne pathogens to circulate throughout the facility and contaminate the feed. In modern slaughterhouses, animals' hides are often covered in manure, making it difficult to keep contaminated fecal matter from coming into contact with an animal's flesh. And if farmers use raw manure for fertilizer, foodborne pathogens, such as *E. coli* or *salmonella*, can even contaminate produce. Outbreaks of food-borne illness are in

¹⁸⁹ Center for Disease Control (CDC), "Multistate Foodborne Outbreak Investigations," accessed January 4, 2013, <http://www.cdc.gov/outbreaknet/outbreaks.html>.

large part due to factory farm conditions and industrialization of meat production, and by extension, associated with the complete commodification of food.

Every year in the United States, millions of tons of chicken, beef, and pork products are recalled due to potential food safety concerns. According to the CDC, an estimated one in six Americans became sick in 2011 from foodborne pathogens.¹⁹⁰ Of the 48 million Americans who contracted foodborne illnesses, 128,000 were hospitalized and 3,000 people died.¹⁹¹ The most recent statistics from the CDC indicate that outbreaks of *salmonella*, *vibrio*, *campylobacter*, and *listeria*, have all remained steady or increased since 2007. Only incidences of *E. coli* have declined within this time period, and only marginally so.¹⁹² Although federal regulatory agencies exist to ensure the quality and safety of our food, they nonetheless are largely influenced by corporate interest as discussed in chapter 2, and consequently have been less than completely effective in ensuring public interest through regulating food production.

The rising rate of obesity and overweight individuals is yet another legitimate food concern for Americans, and has become so increasingly for the rest of the world. In the last 20 years, obesity rates have increased in the United States, and remained quite high. According to the Center for Disease Control (CDC), more than one-third

¹⁹⁰ Center for Disease Control (CDC) “CDC 2011 Estimates: Findings,” updated October 10, 2012, <http://www.cdc.gov/foodborneburden/2011-foodborne-estimates.html/>.

¹⁹¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁹² Center for Disease Control (CDC) “Trends in Foodborne Illness in the United States,” updated February 4, 2013, <http://www.cdc.gov/foodborneburden/2011-foodborne-estimates.html/>.

of American adults (35.7%) and approximately 17% of children and adolescents are considered obese.¹⁹³ Global obesity rates are on the rise too, more than doubling since 1980.¹⁹⁴ In 2004, the United Nations FAO coined the term “globesity” to describe the growing trend of obesity worldwide.¹⁹⁵ The number of adults in the world who are overweight has now exceeded the number of adults who are underweight. The World Health Organization (WHO) further reports that in the majority of the world, the number of deaths from obesity and diet related diseases, such as type 2 diabetes and coronary vascular disease, has surpassed deaths from under-nutrition and food insecurity.¹⁹⁶ The paradox of increasing hunger and obesity is deeply connected to poverty and discrimination. The demographic breakdown of those with type 2 diabetes and heart disease reveals much higher rates among Latino, African, and, broadly lower-income population groups in the US and around the world.¹⁹⁷ This is in large part due to the widespread proliferation and imperialistic imposition of the completely commodified Western diet and subsidized processed foods upon low-income communities and indigenous cultures throughout the world.

The correlation among diet, weight, and health is striking with rise the of global fast food and the Western diet, which is characterized by processed foods and meat, added fat and sugar.¹⁹⁸ The most lethal chronic diseases today are associated

¹⁹³ Center for Disease Control (CDC), “Obesity and Overweight for Professionals: Data and Statistics: Facts,” updated August 13, 2012, <http://www.cdc.gov/obesity/data/facts.html>.

¹⁹⁴ World Health Organization (WHO), “Obesity and Overweight,” updated March 2013, <http://www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs311/en/index.html>.

¹⁹⁵ Gottlieb and Joshi, *Food Justice*, 111.

¹⁹⁶ World Health Organization, “Obesity and Overweight.”

¹⁹⁷ Gottlieb and Joshi, *Food Justice*, 68.

¹⁹⁸ Michael Pollan, *In Defense of Food* (New York: Penguin Press, 2008), 11.

with the Western diet and the industrialization of our foods; the rise of processed grains, chemical usage, abundance of cheap calories, and narrowing of biological diversity within the human diet to primarily just wheat, corn, and soy. People who adopt Western diets suffer from particularly high rates of Western diseases, which include obesity, diabetes, cardiovascular disease, hypertension, and specific diet-related cancers.¹⁹⁹ As the completely commodified Western food system encroaches upon and corrupts traditional cultures and ways of life, global diets have in turn become Westernized resulting in widespread weight gain that has now become a considerable concern for policymakers and communities worldwide.

Admittedly, many food scares are largely overly sensationalized events that receive a disproportionate amount of media attention to play into people's natural anxieties surrounding food. From trans fats, to sodium contents, cholesterol intakes, and most recently, gluten-free diets, the masses are frequently duped into believing food health and safety claims that may not be applicable or truthful. As Levenstien explains, these scares are enforced by messages from fear mongering corporations, nutrition scientists, and the media, all of whom "well-oiled by money and scientific prestige" stand to profit by scaring the masses of something that need not be a concern for all.²⁰⁰ Although these dramatized panics are not directly caused by the physical corruption and degradation of food associated with the complete

¹⁹⁹ Norman J. Temple, *Western Diseases: Their Dietary Prevention And Reversibility* (Totowa, N.J.: Humana Press, 1994).

²⁰⁰ Levenstien, *Fear of Food*, 162.

commodification of food, because these scares are profit driven they are nonetheless a symptom of a corrupted completely commodified food system.

As Michael Pollan identifies in his popular book *In Defense of Food*, these scares are in a sense institutional imperatives of the completely commodified food system as the food industry and the media rely on these panics to perpetuate their existence.²⁰¹ Nutrition science is shaky as it is, relying primarily on human subject's memory and honesty in recording food consumptions, but the pressure to compete to publish significant findings in turns results in bad science and often misleading conclusions.²⁰² These conclusions are then appropriated by the media, which is constantly looking for new material to report. As Pollan asks: who wants to hear again: "eat more fruits and vegetables?"²⁰³ These food scares and fads in turn provide perfect opportunity for the food industry to enter new markets comprised of anxious and vulnerable consumers. The food industry is in essence a multi-billion dollar market machine that capitalizes on constant changes in the market climate to achieve greater profits. It is what Pollan terms, this self-perpetuating profit-driven "Nutrition Industrial Complex"²⁰⁴ that drives American's anxiety around food, and their reliance on marketers, nutritionists, and the media for advice on what to eat.

²⁰¹ Pollan, *In Defense of Food*, 6.

²⁰² *Ibid.*, 61.

²⁰³ *Ibid.*, 6.

²⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 7.

Cuisine as a Solution for the Omnivore's Paradox

Although the Omnivore's paradox has been a preoccupation for humanity throughout history, the anxiety associated with eating has reached an unprecedented level as evidenced by the widespread neurosis surrounding food panics and fad diets. I argue that this anxiety in large part is due to the complete commodification of food and the concomitant loss of traditional culture. This section will examine the ways in which traditional food cultures have historically protected their members from poor health and toxic foods, as well as how the Western diet and completely commodified food system has disrupted this order, resulting in fatter and sicker societies.

People have not always looked to the food industry for advice on what to eat; we used to look to cultural norms and practices to resolve the Omnivore's Paradox. Although the question of what to eat is more confusing for humans than say koalas, humans have culture to guide their decisions on what to eat. Culture once played a critical role in mediating people's relationship to food.²⁰⁵ As Fischler explains, human cuisine is "a body of practices, representations, rules and norms based on classifications" that serves an essential function in resolving the "omnivore's paradox."²⁰⁶ Through the creation of culinary systems, humans developed highly sophisticated cognitive capacities and culturally constructed practices to resolve the anxiety associated with exploring new foods.

²⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 3.

²⁰⁶ Fischler, "Food, Self and Identity," 286.

Food cultures have a great deal to say about what, how, why, when, and how much we should eat. Traditional cuisines classify foods and provide a set of rules to regulate the practices associated with the production, preparation, and consumption of food. Some cultures associate certain foods with particular health outcomes. For instance, the shared Islamic and Jewish prohibition against eating pork is rooted in the justification that pigs, as omnivorous scavengers who eat virtually anything (including carrion), were unclean meat and thus not safe to eat.²⁰⁷

In addition to prohibition on certain foods, most cultures identify what people should eat based on their environmental surroundings and biological needs. For example, the Inuit adapted to their glacial environments with a diet based primarily on seal blubber and meat. Although to Westerners “fat” is taboo, the Inuit relied on fatty seal meat to avoid starvation in late winters if other meat sources became scarce.²⁰⁸ Or take the Maasai, a pastoralist tribe which subsists primarily on milk, meat, and blood. But despite their high fat, high cholesterol diets, the Masasai have low rate of diseases associated with such a diet.²⁰⁹ And while most Westerners regard rice as carb heavy, it is an essential staple in East Asian cuisine as filling base for stir-fried vegetables and lean protein sources. In fact, for much of the world, from Central America to Africa, many cultures subsist primarily on various types of rice and beans, the combination of which forms a complete protein. Pollan further explains how, in general, native populations with traditional diets have little to no heart disease,

²⁰⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁰⁸ Michael Pollan, *Food Rules: An Eater's Manual*, (New York: Penguin Books, 2009), xiii.

²⁰⁹ *Ibid.*

diabetes, cancer, obesity, hypertension, stroke, appendicitis, tooth decay, ulcers, or hemorrhoids as these are all Western diseases associated with the Western diet.²¹⁰

These examples demonstrate that traditional cuisines are diverse, and that humans are well adapted to many different types of healthful diets – that is save the Western diet of processed foods and refined carbohydrates.

Additionally, how a culture consumes food and shares meals is just as important as what it eats. Once a culture classifies certain foods as acceptable to eat, they then apply rules of propriety and context for food consumption that often results in healthful practices. The French, for example, eat a diet of cheeses, pastries, meats, and wine that most Americans would regard as carb-laden and fattening. But the French, unlike most Americans, eat multiple courses throughout the evening, in smaller portions and among family and friends, thus consuming fewer calories than if one were eating alone, in a car, munching on fast food. As Pollan explains in his book *Food Rules: An Eater's Manual*, many cultures have proverbs that dictate people to stop eating before they are full. For the French, when they are finished eating instead of saying they are “full,” they say “je n'ai plus faim,” which translates to literally “I have no more hunger.” Or take the Confucian saying “*hara hachi bu*,” which instructs people to eat until they are 80% full, or the Ayurvedic tradition in India that instructs people to eat until they are 75% full.²¹¹ These cultural aphorisms on how to eat are by no means infallible. Many sayings are merely old wives' tales that convey superstitions. But a number of these cultural practices, such as to eat less, and with other people,

²¹⁰ *Ibid.*, xii.

²¹¹ *Ibid.*, 46.

and over longer periods of time, have nonetheless been confirmed by science as ways of eating healthily.²¹²

Although we once relied on traditional cuisines and cultural norms to identify foods and ways of eating that are safe and beneficial, the complete commodification of food has given birth to the Western diet and industrialized form of agriculture and has in effect displaced traditional food cultures, as well as the protective role they once played in reducing the anxiety associated with the Omnivore's Paradox. But the corruption of traditional food cultures has not only resulted in a heightened collective neurosis regarding food's safety and health, it is also linked to a perhaps more unsettling sense of normlessness and alienation from the world.

Gastro-anomie and the Metaphysical Corruption Food

Along with the physical corruption of food, the progression towards the complete commodification of food has resulted in the metaphysical corruption of the intrinsic worth of traditional food systems. Food cultures have helped define communities of people throughout human history, providing people with a unique identity and a sense of collective belonging. But with the rise of the complete commodification of food, traditional food cultures have largely eroded, resulting in an alienating and normless existence for eaters. This anomic condition associated with the metaphysical corruption of food has in turn produced a second, less tangible,

²¹² *Ibid.*, xvii.

motivation for the local and slow food movements, as people wish to reclaim a sense of identity and meaning through food.

Although many traditional culinary traditions and habits exist to ensure food safety and healthfulness, cultures dictate other arbitrary criteria that have little to do with a food's toxicity or nutritional worth. These traditions in turn help cultures form a collective sense of identity.²¹³ As Fischler discusses, food in particular is "central to individual identity, in that any given human individual is constructed, biologically, psychologically and socially by the food he/she chooses to incorporate." In this regard, food not only nourishes, it also signifies cultural and individual identities. Through a set of cultural norms and procedures, food habits help people mark membership to a religious, ethnic, or socioeconomic culture. From what to eat, to when, or with whom, food cultures distinguish communities of people from one another.²¹⁴

For instance, kosher laws restrict Jews from eating certain foods including pork, shellfish, as well as the mixture of dairy and meat items in one meal. In Judaism, keeping kosher and observing Passover is an eating practice that helps distinguish Jews from other cultures and form a collective sense of identity. Similarly, the term Halal designates foods that are permissible according to Islamic law, and excludes consumption of pork and alcohol. These dietary restrictions, like Jewish kosher laws, have helped define Muslims as a people. There also exist various ethnic culinary identities, such as pasta and pizza for Italians, or sushi and bento boxes for the Japanese, and now for Americans, hamburgers and french fries. Interestingly,

²¹³ Fischler, "Food, Self and Identity," 280.

²¹⁴ *Ibid.*

pejorative terms for ethnic groups are also commonly associated with foods. For instance, The British refer to the French “frogs” and South Asian-Indians as “curry munchers.”²¹⁵ Through the act of eating, eaters form an identity, as they are absorbed into a specific culinary system and thereby the culture that practices it.

The way in which a society eats is one of the most powerful ways in which it can express and preserve its cultural identity. As sociologist Claude Levi-Strauss argues, food, like language, is constructed in accordance with complex grammar and syntax and distinguishes culture from one another.²¹⁶ Food based cultural identities in turn gives the eater a sense of collective belonging and a sense of meaning. In this sense, culinary systems are a part of a culture’s worldview, in a way forming a sort of religious cosmology, linking individuals to the world. In particular, culinary systems play an integral part in giving meaning to cultures by situating them in relation to others.²¹⁷ For instance, many Westerners do not eat insects, despite their abundance and nutritious content, but it is a way of differentiating Western society from “less civilized” cultures. Traditional culinary systems provide reference criteria for identifying foods, providing the eater with a sense of cultural belonging and identity in addition to guiding eaters on how to eat on a daily basis.

According to Fischler, because the act of eating is culturally significant, the identification of foods is integral to the process of individual and collective identity

²¹⁵ *Ibid.*

²¹⁶ Fischler, “Food, Self and Identity,” 286.

²¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 280.

formation.²¹⁸ The ability to identify foods is important because it is interrelated with the procedures for constructing the eater's identity. Identifying foods thus becomes important because eating it both literally and figuratively becomes a part of us once consumed. Both of these aspects of human's relationship to food, cultural and biological, work together to shape our metaphysical and physical selves. The process of individual and cultural identity formation must be understood as dependent upon the ability to identify foods for consumption, as interrelated and mutually reinforcing processes.

But with the complete commodification of the food system, it has become all the more difficult to identify foods, resulting in currents of anxiety and insecurity about food safety and healthfulness as well as individual and cultural identities. When people don't know what they are eating, they are liable to lose awareness of their identity. This phenomenon is now exhibited in the difficulties in identifying food in our commodified food system. Nowadays, food production mostly takes place outside of the home, usually in factories that are remote from the eater. Levenstein explains how in these factories, food undergoes sophisticated modes of processing that "masks, imitates, and transforms" the natural product into "reconstituted proteins, artificial flavors, and preserving techniques." These processed foods are then packaged and stripped of their sensory characteristics, only identifiable by labels as conveyed through sophisticated packaging and branding techniques.²¹⁹

²¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 286.

²¹⁹ Levenstein, *Fear of Food*, 2.

Due to the process of complete commodification and industrialization of the food system, people's ability to identify the contents of foods has now become especially problematic. People are in a certain respect in danger of losing their sense of selves through the processed foods they eat. In a food system that is being completely commodified, it is all the more challenging to identify foods, and consequently increasingly difficult for people to create their own identities and their place in the world. In this regard, the complete commodification and industrialization of processed foods endangers both the health and safety of eaters, as well as their sense of self and cultural identity.

As Fischler observes, cultural identities have been largely disturbed by the industrialization and globalization of the now completely commodified food system.²²⁰ The complete commodification of our food that characterizes the Western diet is systematically and deliberately undermining traditional food cultures everywhere. The novelty and glamour of Western diet with thousands of new food products and billions of dollars put forth for advertising campaign, have overwhelmed traditional cuisines. Sociocultural frameworks governing culinary systems have now been eroded by economic and technological shifts in lifestyle and our industrialized and highly commodified existences. This lifestyle shift is in turn reinforced by our increasingly market oriented institutions, from the food industry, to government, to nutrition science, and the media, all of which are increasingly governed by market norms. These institutions have largely displaced traditional food systems and disturbed cultural

²²⁰ Fischler, "Food, Self and Identity," 289.

identities. In the completely commodified food system, eaters are essentially reduced to the status of consumer, divorced from traditional norms and beliefs and subsumed into a rationalized cult of consumerism.

In his article "Gastro-nomie et gastro-anomie," Fischler suggests that the modern food system is in danger of resulting in a kind of "gastro-anomie," a condition in which people have no sense of dietary norms or rules.²²¹ This notion of "gastro-anomie" is a play on words between "gastronomy" and the social science term "anomie," which was popularized by French Sociologist Emile Durkheim in the late 19th century. As Durkheim explains, anomie is a condition in which people do not feel themselves to be participants in an ongoing social order in which they willingly believe, and so they lack a sense of direction and purpose in their lives. According to Durkheim, the condition of anomie results when rules are unilaterally imposed by one group on another, and are thus experienced as forms of domination. Under these circumstances individuals will experience a sense of normlessness, or what Durkheim terms "anomie."²²²

In terms of food, the complete commodification of the food system has stripped tradition away from food cultures, leaving people alienated and troubled by the source of their food, who prepared it, where it came from, and even what it is. As Fischler astutely recognizes: "to consumers, this situation can be extremely

²²¹ Claude Fischler, "Gastro-nomie Et Gastro-anomie," *Communications* 31, no. 1 (1979): 189-210, doi:10.3406/comm.1979.1477.

²²² Like alienation, anomie is... a sense of formlessness... that one's life is not a meaningful component of some greater enterprises/ structure." Emile Durkheim, *Division of Labor* (1933; repr., New York: The Free Press, 1984), 306.

disquieting. Modern food has become in the eyes of the eater an 'unidentified edible object,' devoid of origin or history, with no respectable past – in short, without identity.²²³ In a literal sense, we know less and less about what it is that we are really eating.

Reidentification of Food: Nutritionism and Food Labeling

The identity of food and ideas about food's healthfulness and meaning have changed markedly over the years, resulting in an alienating nutritional cacophony for eaters. The anxiety associated with the industrial food system has in turn motivated a series of reactionary measures, all of which reflect an effort to re-identify foods and by extension, reclaim a sense of identity. The identification of food is sought through a reinsertion into a new system of coherent rules of behavior whereby the diet recovers a sense of meaning and identity, as does the eater. Reactive demand to resolve anxiety often manifests in a preoccupation with diet, or conversion to an individual food discipline – raw, paleo, gluten free, 100-mile diets etc. All these trends point to similar direction; through recipes or diets, the aim is to combat gastro-anomie by reintroducing a normative order of eating behaviors.²²⁴

But it is admittedly important to note that our modern food system is not entirely without norms. With the complete commodification of food, market norms and highly rationalized ideology of nutritionism have overtaken traditional ways of eating

²²³ Fischler, "Food, Self and Identity," 289.

²²⁴ *Ibid.*, 281.

and being, dictating the production and consumption of foods. Instead of parental figures and conventional wisdom, people now rely on well intentioned, but error-prone, nutrition scientists and food marketers who are all too eager to exploit every food scare and fad. With the aid of the government and media, these actors have created a new highly rationalized ideology of “nutritionism,” a term posed by Australian sociologist, Gyorgy Scrinis to describe the ideology associated with the reductionist way of looking at food in terms of nutrient content.²²⁵ The rise of nutritionism has in turn given way to an extensive food-labeling project with the aim of helping consumers better identify the foods they purchase. The imposition of market norms, the ideology of nutritionism, and extensive labeling schemes, however, have failed to serve the biological and existential needs of humanity, resulting in a pervasive sense of “gastro-anomie,” which has come to inspire the spate of local, slow, and organic food movements we see today.

Interestingly the same religious forces that gave rise to modern day capitalism and the cult of consumerism also gave way to nutritionism and quasi-religious diets. While the protestant work ethic gave rise to a now secularized and rationalized system of capitalism, the same puritanical aversion to pleasure also contributed to the empirical and rationalized ideology of nutritionism. As Levenstien explains, the residual American puritanism created a culture of feeling guilty about self-indulgence. Consequently, for many, particularly middle class Americans, taste and pleasure are no longer the primary criteria dictating their food choices. Instead, American eating

²²⁵ Gyorgy Scrinis, “On the Ideology of Nutritionism,” *Gastronomica: The Journal of Food and Culture* 8, no.1 (Winter 2008): 39-48, doi: 10.1525/gfc.2008.8.1.39.

habits are increasingly guided by the nutritional content of foods, which are only known to nutrition scientists.²²⁶ Consequently, these nutritionists have become the scientific priests of nutritionism, creating rules of nutrition that must be followed in order to achieve good health.

Just over the course of the last few decades, people have become disciples of nutritionism, preoccupied with the low-fat craze, the Atkins low-carb diet, anti-oxidants, and omega-3 fatty acids. For these adherents, what matters most is not the food but rather the nutrient content of foods. Nutritionism insists that the whole point of eating is to promote bodily health, but this view is not shared by all cultures. Moreover nutritionism, like market ideology is highly individualistic, and assumes that people are able to make consumption decisions on their own accord, independent from others and their socioeconomic context. As a vestige of its puritanical roots and a product of Western individualism, nutritionism encourages eaters to blame their health problems on their own lifestyle choices, despite the evidence showing that socioeconomic standing is far more predictive than diet or exercise in determining heart health.²²⁷ The purpose of eating is thus entirely removed from its social and cultural context, and is instead preoccupied exclusively with the achievement of individual health. Although some stand to benefit from following certain diets, corporate advertising schemes have duped many adherents of nutritionism into fad diets that have only made both the dieter and the industry's pocketbooks, fatter.

²²⁶ Levenstien, *Fear of Food*, 4.

²²⁷ *Ibid.*

Although nutritionism arose to help us deal with problems associated with Western diet, according to Pollan, it has now largely been coopted by industry to sell fortified foods and undermine authority of traditional food cultures in the way of fast and convenience foods.²²⁸ In this regard, nutritionism has aided the transition from traditional food cultures to a highly rationalized and individualistic completely commodified food system. As explained previously, food consumers have resigned themselves to fear-mongering food marketers and journalists to inform their decisions about foods and eating behaviors, resulting in a self-reinforcing nutrition industrial complex that drives Americans' anxiety around food and bolsters the ideology of nutritionism.²²⁹ The food industry markets dubious food-like products on the basis of unfounded health claims, and the government issues dietary advice based on shifting nutrition research. This corrupt use of nutrition science is primarily seen in both the food industry's and governmental regulatory agencies' efforts to reidentify foods through food labeling schemes.

If nutritionism is akin to a religion, then food labels are its spiritual texts. The food labeling process is entrusted to government regulatory agencies and even private food corporations. The FDA and the USDA regulate and certify labels that are commonly seen on food packages in the grocery store. These FDA labels feature health claims for products that suggest reductions in risk: high calcium and reduced risk of osteoporosis, low salt and high blood pressure, low fat and heart disease, low

²²⁸ Pollan, *In Defense of Food*, 32.

²²⁹ *Ibid.*, 7.

fat and cancer, high fiber and heart disease, and high fiber and cancer.²³⁰ The USDA also certifies products that conform to certain production guidelines, including organic and natural foods as well as free-range animal products.²³¹ Although well intended, these labeling schemes often result in misleading health claims and “green washing,” a form of marketing spin that industries use to promote the perception that their products are environmentally friendly and to deflect public criticism of otherwise questionable practices.²³²

The USDA attempts to regulate the labeling of food products that claim to uphold certain production guidelines, including organic and natural food items as well as free-range animal products. But many items carrying these labels tell very little about the product, and are instead used primarily by food processors to convince customers to spend more on products that are essentially the same as the conventional equivalents. According to USDA, “natural” meat and poultry products cannot contain artificial ingredients or added colors and ought to be minimally processed.²³³ But the criteria for “minimally processed” are vague, and the “natural label” does not reflect how the animals were raised, what they were fed, if antibiotics or hormones were used, or other aspects of production that consumers might expect from foods carrying such a label. The “Free Range” label is equally deceptive. In order for a product to be

²³⁰ Food and Drug Administration (FDA), “Food Labeling Guide Appendix C: Health Claims,” last modified October 2009, <http://www.fda.gov/Food/GuidanceComplianceRegulatoryInformation/GuidanceDocuments/FoodLabelingNutrition/FoodLabelingGuide/ucm064919.htm>.

²³¹ United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), “Food and Nutrition Information Center,” last updated April 3, 2013, <http://fnic.nal.usda.gov/food-labeling>.

²³² Gottlieb and Joshi, *Food Justice*, 183.

²³³ USDA, “Food Labeling: meat and Poultry labeling terms,” last modified April 12, 2011, http://www.fsis.usda.gov/FACTSheets/Meat_&_Poultry_Labeling_Terms/index.asp

certified as “Free Range,” producers must demonstrate to the USDA that poultry has been allowed access outside.²³⁴ But the USDA regulates “Free Range” label only for poultry, not for pigs, cattle, or even egg-laying chickens. Moreover, the criteria for “Free Range” certification insists that labeled chickens have access to the outdoors every day, but does not specify the amount of space provided or time spent outdoors and cannot even assure that the animals ever went outside.

The USDA Organic seal is perhaps the most stringent production-based food label. According to the USDA, the “Organic” label indicates that “the food or other agricultural product has been produced through approved methods that integrate cultural, biological, and mechanical practices that foster cycling of resources, promote ecological balance, and conserve biodiversity. Synthetic fertilizers, sewage sludge, irradiation, and genetic engineering may not be used.”²³⁵ But even organic certification is not without its faults. As the organic movement has become popularized (in large part due to food scares from the conventional industrial food system), it has attracted the attention of agribusiness corporations as a profitable point of market entry, and in doing so, has crowded out small independent organic farmers from the market and slowly emptied the term “organic” of its original values and meaning.

At the height of its inception around 1970, “organic” meant more than just a technique of agriculture. The organic movement called for alternative modes of production and distribution (co-ops and health food stores) that challenged

²³⁴ *Ibid.*

²³⁵ United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), “National Organic Program,” last updated February 5, 2013, <http://www.ams.usda.gov/AMSv1.0/nop>.

conventional industrial agriculture, focusing on locally grown foods, humane treatment of animals, fair labor practices, value of a shorter and more transparent food chain, and the preservation of small family farms. But now, agribusiness and government officials have coopted the term “organic” for foods that meet the USDA’s aforementioned production standards.²³⁶ In doing so, the USDA has subjected organic foods to complete commodification, stripping the term of its original values, deeming them as impractical or unprofitable. Although USDA standards for organic foods do an admirable job of setting a baseline for more environmentally responsible agricultural practices, many of the values connoted in the term “organic” have nonetheless been compromised in the legislation process.

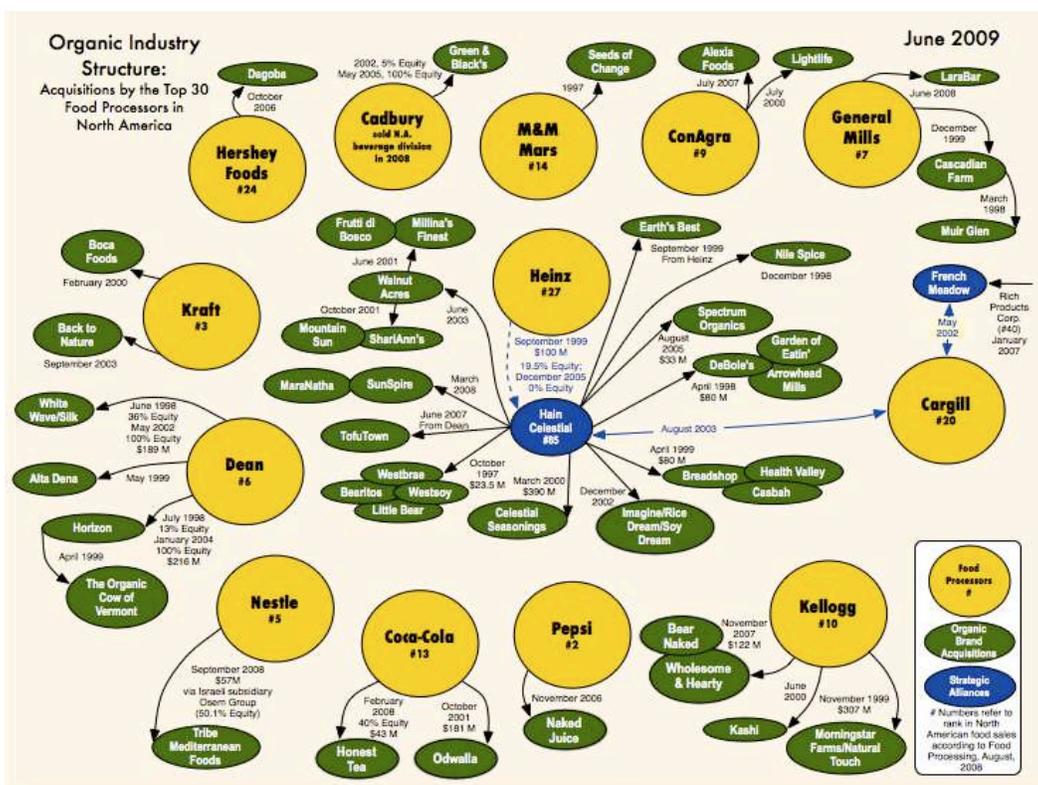
The USDA organic certification process is also considerably costly, and has driven many small independent organic farmers out of business as the organic food industry has grown, further consolidating the now completely commodified food system.²³⁷ Although several private organic food companies have remained independent, including Clif Bar, Newman’s Own, and Nature’s Path, the majority of recognizable organic food brands have been coopted by corporate food processors. Kellogg has acquired once independent Kashi, Morningstar Farms, and Bear Naked organic brands; General Mills now controls formerly autonomous Cascadian Farm organic foods; and Heinz now manages Spectrum Organics, Soy/Rice Dream, and

²³⁶ Michael Pollan, “Behind the Organic-Industrial Complex,” *The New York Times*, May 13, 2001, <http://www.nytimes.com/2001/05/13/magazine/13ORGANIC.html>.

²³⁷ *Ibid.*

Arrowhead Mills through its strategic alliance with Hain Celestial (see Figure 1).²³⁸

This corporate consolidation and subsequent complete commodification of the organic food sector has in effect corrupted the original values of the once meaningful term, “organic.” The promise of wholesome food and the stories associated with natural, free range, and organic is appealing, but labeling regulations and the organic food industry cannot completely fulfill this existential desire.²³⁹



(Figure 1. Source: Howard, Philip H. 2009. Organic Industry Structure. Media-N: Journal of the New Media Caucus, 5(3) <https://www.msu.edu/~howardp//organicindustry.html>).

Similar to the labeling schemes for natural, free range, and organic food production, labels for health claims for certain foods have fallen to corporate

²³⁸ Philip H. Howard, “Organic Processing Industry Structure,” accessed April 4, 2013, <https://www.msu.edu/~howardp//organicindustry.html>.

²³⁹ Pollan, “Behind the Organic-Industrial Complex.”

influence, resulting in often misleading and conflicting labeling. As Marion Nestle illustrates in *Food Politics*, these labeling efforts are in many ways influenced by producers of conventional foods.²⁴⁰ For example, although regulatory officials know that meat and dairy foods are major sources of dietary fat and heart disease in American diets, it is politically inexpedient to enforce labeling schemes that suggest reduced consumption of foods. Consequently, government dietary guidelines do not mention whole foods, and instead focus on nutrients so as to avoid offending any powerful food industry interests.²⁴¹ This phenomenon has in turn helped bolster the ideology of nutritionism and its pervasiveness in the Western diet.

Despite these measures, the food industry has nonetheless been able to influence government regulatory officials into legislating dietary guidelines that protect their interests. For instance, Kraft successfully lobbied the FDA from making regulations that would inhibit them from labeling their cheese products as low-fat food, which in turn raised the limit on the amount of fat allowed in food products labeled as “low-fat.” But perhaps most egregious of all is the laxity in regulations for the term “healthy” on food labels. Most infamously, manufacturers claimed that jellybeans were “healthy” because they have a low fat and sodium content. The FDA eventually closed this loophole by instigating the “jelly bean rule,” which restricted misleading dietary and health claims by specifying limits in sodium and cholesterol, and minimum nutrient requirements.²⁴²

²⁴⁰ Nestle, *Food Politics*, 255.

²⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 256.

²⁴² *Ibid.*

But perhaps more disturbing, private companies are now finding their way around the FDA's requirements, and have begun to develop their own nutrition criteria and labeling schemes and capitalize on the rising health concerns of America. For instance, Disney's "Magic Healthy Living" campaign markets what they believe to be healthy and nutritious food to children through its "Mickey Check" promotion, which labels Disney-licensed food products that meet certain industry-approved nutrition standards.²⁴³ Other industry led self-endorsing food labels include PepsiCo's Smart Spot, and Kraft's Sensible Solution campaigns.²⁴⁴ Possibly the most infamous private labeling scheme, however, is the widely recognized and now discontinued "Smart-Choice Program."²⁴⁵

The Smart-Choice Program was a self-congratulatory nutrition rating system developed by the American Society for Nutrition and National Science Foundation international, and supported by the nation's largest food manufacturers including, Kellogg's, Kraft Foods, ConAgra Foods, Unilever, General Mills, PepsiCo, and Tyson. Each of these companies paid upwards of \$100,000 annually to include the ubiquitous green check mark to label their food products as a "smart choice." The program claimed to give a scientific front-of-package nutrition labeling system that helped consumers make smarter food and beverage choices. In effect however, items labeled as "smart choices" mostly included highly processed foods, such as sugary

²⁴³ The Walt Disney Company, "Magic of Healthy Living," accessed February 1, 2013, <http://thewaltdisneycompany.com/citizenship/responsible-content/magic-healthy-living>.

²⁴⁴ Andrew Martin, "Some Big Food Companies Adopt Nutrient Standards," *The New York Times*, October 28, 2008, <http://query.nytimes.com/gst/fullpage.html>.

²⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

cereals and salty frozen dinners and snacks with supposedly higher proportion of “good” nutrients.²⁴⁶ The FDA soon recognized the problems associated with the misleading Smart Choice Program, and encouraged the group to discontinue the program in 2009.²⁴⁷

In a 2009 speech to the National Food Policy Conference, FDA Commissioner Dr. Margaret Hamburg recognized “the public health importance of food labeling as an essential means for informing consumers about proper nutrition,” and further acknowledged that consumer health “has not been substantially addressed since the FDA implemented the Nutrition Labeling and Education Act, more than 16 years ago.”²⁴⁸ Since Hamburg delivered this speech, the FDA and the USDA have begun to address labeling challenges, in discontinuing the use of industry’s Smart Choices program, and in re-proposing criteria regarding “all natural” claims on meat and poultry labels.²⁴⁹

But even though progress is being made, regulatory attempts to “re-identify” foods through regulatory labeling schemes are nonetheless problematic because they fail to address the recognitional injustices that underlie our increasingly market-driven food system. Nutritionism and food labeling merely perpetuate a liberal

²⁴⁶ Lupton, Joanne R., Douglas A. Balentine, Richard M. Black, Regina Hildwine, Barbara J. Ivens, Eileen T. Kennedy, Patricia T. Packard, Bradley R. Sperber, Daniel Steffen, and Mary Story, “The Smart Choices Front-of-package Nutrition Labeling Program: Rationale and Development of the Nutrition Criteria,” *The American Journal of Clinical Nutrition* 91, no. 4 (April 1, 2010): 1078S–1089S. doi:10.3945/ajcn.2010.28450B.

²⁴⁷ Food and Drug Administration (FDA), “Letter to the Smart Choices Program,” accessed February 4, 2013, <http://www.fda.gov/Food/LabelingNutrition/LabelClaims/ucm180146.htm>.

²⁴⁸ Center for Science in the Public Interest (CSPI), “Food Labeling Chaos Report: Executive Summary,” (2010): i, www.cspinet.org/new/pdf/food_labeling_chaos_report.pdf.

²⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

preoccupation with consumer sovereignty and individualism that only further alienates the consumer from an authentic cultural identity. These recognitional injustices cannot be rectified by the completely commodified food system alone; only the reclamation of traditional food systems and norms can correct these injustices.

Justice as Recognition of Food Cultures and its Critics

Justice is often narrowly conceived as exclusively distributive justice. But the definition of justice extends beyond just questions of distribution to include other forms, including justice as recognition, which he argues cannot be collapsed into the distributive paradigm. What exactly is meant by the term “recognition?” On the one hand, recognition is psychological, as individual self-worth often comes from recognition by others. Human dignity and integrity thus require intersubjective recognition. But recognition is not only reduced to individuals’ psychology, it also functions at a structural and institutional level to encompass whole cultures and the state.²⁵⁰ With this understanding, recognitional justice is realized when all cultures and ways of being are recognized and respected. In many respects, injustice as a lack of recognition can be just as harmful as a lack of physical goods. A failure to recognize an individual’s self-worth or dignity in turn results in a psychological form of recognitional injustice. Furthermore, instances of cultural imperialism, nonrecognition, and outright disrespect of other cultures’ identity and ways of being result in recognitional injustices

²⁵⁰ Schlosberg, *Defining Environmental Justice*, 13.

at the structural and institutional level.²⁵¹ In the case of food, the imperialistic and complete commodification of food resources has dominated traditional food cultures in such a way that has resulted in recognitional injustice.

Many contend, however, that the slow, local, and organic food movements' reaction against the recognitional injustices of the completely commodified food system is a "luxury of the rich," and the notion that traditional and organic farming could feed the world is a purely elitist attitude.²⁵² But this line of thought is misleading as competing studies show that not only *can* traditional and organic forms of agriculture feed the planet, but that organic and sustainable forms of agriculture *must* feed the planet given the impending challenges of climate change.

Perhaps most notably, a study conducted by Badgley et al. investigates the potential contributions of organic agriculture to the global food supply with a particular focus on common contentions against organic forms of agriculture, including low-yields and low quantities of natural nitrogen fertilizers. In this study, organic is understood as farming practices that are agroecological, sustainable, or ecological and includes such practices as the use of cover crops, manures, compost, crop rotation, intercropping, and integrated pest management. This study found that these organic methods of agriculture have the potential to substantially contribute to the global food supply, particularly in the developing world, while simultaneously reducing negative environmental impacts of industrial forms of agriculture. In some

²⁵¹ *Ibid.*

²⁵² "Although the concerns of the critics of modern agriculture may be understandable, the reaction against intensive farming is a luxury of the rich. Traditional and organic farming could feed Europeans and Americans well. It cannot feed the world." "The 9 billion-people question," *The Economist*.

cases, the study found that organic methods of agriculture resulted in higher yields than conventional methods.²⁵³

Moreover, many of these studies have found agroecological methods of farming to be more resilient and adaptive to the effects of climate change, including droughts and increased temperatures.²⁵⁴ This is because agroecological methods of farming, unlike conventional monocropping, utilize organic fertilizers and nitrogen fixing legumes to protect soil from erosion, high temperatures, and moisture loss. In addition, organic farms that follow agroecological practices are typically polycultures (meaning that they grow many different types of crops), which help preserve biodiversity and ensure greater genetic variety and thereby better resiliency to adverse climate conditions.²⁵⁵ For these reasons, many regard agroecological methods of agriculture to be essential for ensuring future food security in light of the growing threat of climate change.

Chief among those who hold such opinions are the experts who prepared the International Assessment of Agricultural Knowledge, Science, and Technology for Development (IAASTD) report. Initiated by the World Bank, the IAASTD report reflects an enormous international and intergovernmental effort to evaluate the quality and efficacy of the world's present "agriculture and agricultural knowledge, science

²⁵³ Badgley, C., J. Moghtader, E. Quintero, E. Zakem, M. J. Chappell, K. Aviles-Vazquez, A. Samulon, and I. Perfecto, "Organic Agriculture and the Global Food Supply," *Renewable Agriculture and Food Systems* 22, no. 2 (2007): 86-108.

²⁵⁴ Miguel A. Altieri and Parviz Koohafkan, *Enduring Farms: Climate Change, Smallholders and Traditional Farming Communities*, (Penang, Malaysia: Third World Network, 2008).

²⁵⁵ Miguel A. Altieri, "Agroecology: The Science of Natural Resource Management for Poor Farmers in Marginal Environments," *Agriculture, Ecosystems and Environment* 93, no.1 (2002): 1-24, <http://www.agroeco.org/wp-content/uploads/2010/11/NRMfinal.pdf>.

and technology,” (AKST) as well as the effectiveness of current public and private sector arrangements of food systems across the world. After a multi-year process, participating scientists declared that: “business as usual is no longer an option.”²⁵⁶ According to these experts: “the way the world grows its food will have to change radically to better serve the poor and hungry if the world is to cope with growing population and climate change while avoiding social breakdown and environmental collapse.” The overarching message of the IAASTD offers little support for GM technology or a new Green Revolution, and instead advocates an agroecological bottom-up approach to combatting food.²⁵⁷

The organic versus conventional agriculture debate is admittedly a contentious and largely unsettled one. And although it is important to consider the practicalities associated with feeding a growing global population, the claim that this can only be achieved through industrial forms of agriculture and private food markets remains wanting. Without doubt, conventional agriculture produces far more than enough calories to feed the planet. But as discussed in chapter 3, the problem of hunger and malnutrition must be understood not in terms of production shortages, but rather as a result of entitlement failures, a form of injustice in which a society fails to *recognize* an individual’s or community’s dignity in denying equal access to food. So given that there is enough food in the world to feed everyone (both sustainably and in accordance with traditional cultural principles and norms), the primacy of food as a

²⁵⁶ International Assessment of Agricultural Knowledge, Science and Technology for Development (IAASTD), *Agriculture at a Crossroads: Synthesis Report*, (Washington DC: Island Press, 2009), 3.

²⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

universal distributive principle is not violated by recognizing a diversity of food cultures and various forms of traditional agriculture. Thus, if organic agriculture and traditional food systems can distribute food in a way that meets the biological needs of its constituents, then recognizing traditional forms of agriculture as a legitimate food system does not necessarily pose a threat to the humanity's food needs.

Recognizably, however, the popularity of local and organic foods has reached the point where economically, these foods are valued such that they cannot be distributed in a way that recognizes everyone's food needs. The problem of cost is a common and legitimate argument against local and organic foods, as organic and local foods from farmers' markets tend to be more expensive than their conventional counterparts, and it is thus undeniably insensitive and elitist to suggest that everyone should purchase local and organic foods. But it is nonetheless important to recognize that there are innumerable external economic forces at work that currently contribute to the prohibitive costs of organic and local foods that are not necessarily intrinsic to their cost of production or value.

For one, the organic movement has given rise to a new industrial organics complex, in which food processors exploit consumers' fears and anxieties of conventional foods to leverage maximum profits with no regard for a community's well-being.²⁵⁸ In addition, the role of government food subsidies undoubtedly skews agricultural production towards commodity crops that are used primarily for animal feed and the production of processed foods. What would the true cost of a hamburger

²⁵⁸ Pollan, *In Defense of Food*, 7.

be without government subsidies? What if the government subsidized farmers who grew non-commodity “specialty” food crops? The way in which our government subsidizes foods greatly influences the prices of foods, and consequently what the nation eats. Lastly, those who work within the food system are not paid enough to be able to afford their own products or services. A just food system must recognize the value of those who work in the food system and appropriately compensate them in a way such that they would be able to purchase healthy, nutritious, and culturally appropriate foods. If farmers’ and food workers’ efforts were recognized and appropriately compensated, there would be fewer entitlement failures, and consequently people would better be able to afford fresh, local, and organic food. The benefits of eating locally would be shared among the farm, the producer, the laborer, the community and the consumer, resulting in a sustainable and healthy local economy. But only under these conditions will justice as recognition be realized.

Conclusion

Justice as recognition in the form of the slow, local, and organic food movements should not be seen as at odds with the distributive justice aims of the food justice movement. There is more than enough food in the world to feed people in a way that also recognizes the diversity of food cultures and social norms and practices. In this regard, neither movement is superior to the other, and the relationship between the two is not dichotomous with mutually opposing interests. In fact,

effective distributive justice is dependent upon the ideal of equal distribution of recognition. This fact is demonstrated in Rawls's liberal conception of distributive justice, which asserts a kind of equal recognition in his conception of the original position and veil of ignorance as a precondition for arbitrating just distributions of primary goods and services.²⁵⁹ However, as explained, the original position is a theoretical assumption that cannot be realized; we cannot assume that everyone is given equal respect and recognition in a world mired with socially and historically constructed disparities. Without doubt, the ideal of equal recognition takes concerted effort on the part of communities.

Fortunately, recognition, unlike services and material goods (such as food), is not a thing but rather a relationship, the distribution of which is inherently not zero-sum. Unlike material things, the recognitional pie can be expanded infinitely because it is not materially limited. Consequently, there are no material limits in recognizing the intrinsic worth of traditional food cultures and food systems. But as addressed in Chapter One, there is a limited sense in which a cultural or social meaning of a food could be recognized as the primary basis for distributive justice. Although the ability to recognize other cultures' food practices is materially unlimited, it is nonetheless impossible to judge whether one culinary system, or one form of agriculture, or one food system is more primary than another. As Walzer suggests, no one food system is inherently superior. Thus the only way to establish a single legitimate arrangement for producing, distributing, and consuming food must be through a process of discursive

²⁵⁹ Schlosberg, *Defining Environmental Justice*, 20.

pluralism that recognizes historical and cultural particularities. This conclusion thus calls for the topic of the next chapter, procedural justice, which discusses the aims of food democracy and related food sovereignty movements.

Chapter 5: Food Sovereignty Movements and Procedural Justice

“Food sovereignty” and “food democracy” are principles that emphasize citizens’ right to determine food policies related to their communities. Although “food democracy” is typically the term used in relation to food systems and food policy councils in developed countries, and the “food sovereignty” movement is typically in reference to landless farmers and peasants in less-industrialized societies, these terms are not exclusively defined as such. “Food democracy” and “food sovereignty” are similar concepts that are more or less interchangeable given that the principle objective of both movements is to ensure that every stakeholder has a voice in determining the production processes and distribution of food resources. In this chapter, I argue that members of the food sovereignty/democracy movement further challenge both the distributive and recognitional injustices that are produced by the completely commodified food system by reclaiming their right to autonomously define their own food systems through collective governance, or rather procedural justice.

Procedural justice, as understood here, is one in which justice is defined as fair and equitable institutional procedures of decision-making.²⁶⁰ Although the commonly espoused consumer sovereignty based “vote with your fork” model maintains that consumers have the power to shape and influence the food system democratically through their purchases, I argue that markets alone are insufficient for realizing true procedural justice. This is because markets inhibit many low-income individuals from participating in this process due to the distributive injustices that are inherent in an

²⁶⁰ Schlosberg, *Defining Environmental Justice*, 4.

increasingly inequitable society. And although various government supported food aid programs allow individuals greater capability to make purchases that influence the shape of the food system, these programs nonetheless fail to result in procedural justice as they merely perpetuate a completely commodified food system that fails to uphold justice as recognition, ignoring the food cultures and traditions of its consumers.

Genuine food democracy, on the other hand, fully affirms procedural justice as it recognizes the diversity of cultures and backgrounds held by all of its constituents, it then allows citizens, regardless of their socioeconomic standing, to shape the food system and distribute food in accordance with these ideals and needs. In advocating for procedural justice, food democracy implicitly links the recognitional justices that are upheld by the locavore and slow food movements, with the distributive justice values of the food justice movement. Consequently, I argue that food democracy is critical in realizing a food system that affirms both human dignity and biological necessity.

Procedural Justice and Democracy

Procedural justice and democracy are closely linked concepts that connect recognitional and distributive justice to one another. Procedural justice, as advocated by the food democracy/sovereignty movement, is defined as fair and equitable institutional procedure of decision making, which implies a broad and authentic base

of equal public participation.²⁶¹ In order for a policy to be regarded as just or legitimate, all those who are affected by the policy must have an effective voice in its consideration and be able to agree without coercion. As political scientist Francis Fukuyama highlights in his work *The End of History and the Last Man*, humans throughout history have fought for such political recognition, culminating in the recent groundswell of liberal democracies, which as institutions have provided humankind the opportunity for such universal and equal recognition and thereby genuine recognitional justice.²⁶² Furthermore, a democracy must be responsive to the needs of its entire citizenry in order to retain political legitimacy, which entails recognizing the dignity of its people through the distribution of both economic entitlements and political rights, resulting in true distributive justice.²⁶³ And so while equal and universal recognition remains a precondition for democratic institutions, these institutions, in turn, are a precondition for distributive justice. Democracies thus uphold each of the types of justice that have been discussed in this thesis: distributive, recognitional, and procedural.

In the case of food, procedural justice in the form of democratic institutions plays an important protective role against food shortages, and thereby ensures greater distributive justice. As discussed in Chapter Three, Amartya Sen explains how famine and food shortages are often the result of systemic entitlement failures rather than an actual limited supply of food resources. Sen extends this claim further in asserting that

²⁶¹ *Ibid.*

²⁶² Francis Fukuyama, *End of History and the Last Man* (New York: Free Press, 2006).

²⁶³ Robert A. Dahl, *Poliarchy: Participation and Opposition* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1971), 2.

functioning multiparty democracies never experience famine because they are more effective than authoritarian regimes at preventing entitlement failures.²⁶⁴ Sen attributes this causal relationship to the political incentives that are created by democracies that make them more responsive to the needs of its citizenry, including regular elections, multiparty politics, and uncensored media. In democracies, elected officials are greatly incentivized to enact policies that ensure their citizens' entitlement to food, not only for the political purposes of reelection, but also because they too would fall victim if famine occurred.²⁶⁵

But in most authoritarian states, fair and equitable institutional procedures of decision-making are uncommon, and procedural justice is rarely upheld. This is because monarchs and dictators have no need to respond to the food needs and wishes their constituents as they are never up for reelection or in competition with an opposing political party, and thus never suffer from political consequences if they fail to enact preventative policies against famine. Famines kill millions of people around the world, but they never kill dictators or monarchs. Although most governments can easily prevent famine through the creation of careful redistribution policies, as well as emergency employment schemes and short-term public projects, authoritarian countries rarely enact these kinds of policies due to the lack of political accountability.²⁶⁶ Consequently these nations have historically been the ones who suffer from famine most frequently. For instance, the bread shortages that occurred in

²⁶⁴ Amartya Sen, *Development as Freedom* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 178.

²⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

King Louis XVI's France and Tsar Nicholas II's Russia, in addition to the famines in modern North Korea, Maoist China, and Stalin's USSR are all examples of this rule.

Today, however, the dominant global food system is no longer governed by a politically authoritarian regime, but rather by an equally authoritarian oligopolistic agribusiness empire. The complete commodification of the food system has now resulted in what prominent food justice scholar and activist Eric Holt-Giménez refers to as the “corporate food regime.”²⁶⁷ And just as in authoritarian food systems past, the completely commodified food “regime” results in procedural injustice and is thereby failing to protect against food shortages and malnutrition. In this regard, a completely commodified food system can be just as undesirable and tyrannical as an entirely state-owned, totalitarian system of food production and distribution.

Vote with Your Fork and the Shortcomings of Consumer Sovereignty

Proponents of the consumer sovereignty maintain, however, that at least in case of food, consumers can influence the landscape of the food marketplace democratically through their food purchases. As Michael Pollan advocates: “You can simply stop participating in a system that abuses animals or poisons the water or squanders jet fuel flying asparagus around the world. You can vote with your fork, in other words, and you can do it three times a day.”²⁶⁸ But the “voting” that takes place

²⁶⁷ Holt-Giménez, “Food Movements, Agroecology, and the Future of Food and Farming.”

²⁶⁸ Michael Pollan, “Voting With Your Fork,” *New York Times Opinion: On the Table*, accessed April 7, 2013, <http://pollan.blogs.nytimes.com/2006/05/07/voting-with-your-fork/>.

at the supermarket checkout is a poor substitute for the voting that occurs when people engage in genuine political discourse and democratic elections. As Pollan further recognizes in his recent article “Vote for the Dinner Party”:

People by the millions have begun, as the slogan goes, to vote with their forks in favor of more sustainably and humanely produced food, and against agribusiness. But does that kind of vote constitute a genuine politics? Yes and no.... if the food movement doesn't move to democratize the benefits of food good, it will be – and will deserved to be – branded as elitist. That's why, sooner or later, the food movement will have to engage in the hard politics of Washington – of voting with votes, not just forks...²⁶⁹

In a functioning democracy, anyone is capable of exercising his or her democratic freedom to vote. But in the free market, not everyone can afford to vote with his or her fork. In fact, many marginalized members of society remain unable to vote with their forks due to the existing distributive injustices and entitlement failures that are inherent to completely commodified food system. Consequently, the food movement must democratize, as Pollan suggests, if it is to be seen as no longer elitist.

Nevertheless, proponents of consumer sovereignty maintain that the “vote with your fork” slogan is “the battle cry of the food movement.”²⁷⁰ Advocates of the “vote with your fork” model view market transactions as a normative choice, and contend that if everyone shopped in accordance with their values, then the food

²⁶⁹ Michael Pollan, “Vote for the Dinner Party,” *The New York Times*, October 10, 2012, <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/10/14/magazine/why-californias-proposition-37-should-matter-to-anyone-who-cares-about-food.html>.

²⁷⁰ Josh Viertel “Beyond Voting With Your Fork: From Enlightened Eating to Movement Building,” in *Food Movements Unite!: Strategies to Transform Our Food System*, ed. Eric Holt-Giménez (Oakland: Food First Books, 2011), 139.

system would be largely reflective of everyone's ideals.²⁷¹ If on the one hand, consumers purchase a certain type of food, they then demonstrate that they value the food product through their willingness to pay for it. Through the act of purchasing, consumers are able to vote for a system that supports their ideals, including local, sustainable, and ethically produced foods. Conversely, if people are unwilling to pay for highly processed and unethically produced foods, then these food items will be discontinued and the production of these food products will cease. The individualistic and market orientation of the "vote with your fork" slogan has appealed to many affluent consumers, compelling them to consume their way to a more just and verdant food system.

In a post-Cold War world, with the fall of the wall and the "triumph of capitalism," many people now conflate the freedom associated with genuine democratic political participation to the market freedom of individual choice associated with capitalist consumerism.²⁷² Many proponents of the "vote with your fork" model view governments as overly bureaucratic and wasteful, and consequently favor a free market solution.²⁷³ But despite the popular appeal of market-oriented "vote with your fork" approach, this consumer sovereignty based model nonetheless has severe shortcomings in its ability to realize universal access to sufficient quantities of safe, healthy, and culturally appropriate foods. Markets, like governments, frequently fail to function in a socially desirable manner for a number of reasons, but perhaps the

²⁷¹ Anderson, *Value and Ethics in Economics*, 194.

²⁷² *Ibid.*, 164.

²⁷³ *Ibid.*, 192.

most problematic of these reasons includes the instances where exchanges are made without plural consent. Advocates of free markets assume that no one is forced to engage in trade in the free market system, and that all consumers are at liberty to make purchasing decisions according to their own self-interested preferences and desires.²⁷⁴ But in the case of the present food system, the complete commodification of food yields distributive injustices whereby only a select segment of the population is actually able to base its food purchases on ideals. While millions of shoppers buy organic food from their local farmers' markets and cook it from scratch, millions more worry about where their next meal will come from, and do not have the luxury of time or money to purchase and cook local and organic ingredients.²⁷⁵

As Viertel asserts, if food purchasing is to be viewed as a democratic process, then it must be further recognized that a significant portion of the world's population is currently barred from the polls.²⁷⁶ In true democracies, all citizens have the democratic freedom to physically access the polls (or rather quality grocery stores) to cast their vote. But in the current food system, many people do not have this freedom. These disenfranchised individuals live in food deserts where the nearest supermarket may be miles away and inaccessible by public transportation, or live in food swamps with only access to unhealthy food that is unsustainable and produced with exploited labor.

²⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 193.

²⁷⁵ Josh Viertel "Beyond Voting With Your Fork: From Enlightened Eating to Movement Building," 141.

²⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

In addition to physical access, citizens must have the capability to cast their vote in a functioning democracy. In the case of the “vote with your fork” model, this means that consumers must have the means with which to purchase foods according to their ideals. But this condition is also decidedly presumptuous considering that millions of Americans continue to live below the poverty line, and that almost a quarter of the world’s population — over one billion people — live on less than \$1.25 a day.²⁷⁷ In addition to monetary considerations, people’s food purchasing decisions are further limited because cooking takes time and skill, and not everyone has the luxury of time or knowledge to make nutritious meals from scratch at the end of a long workday.²⁷⁸ So, given the physical, monetary, and temporal constraints, many people are effectively coerced into purchasing, and thus voting for, cheap and unhealthy processed and fast foods because they cannot afford to vote in any other way.

The “vote with your fork” model fails as a democratic system of collective decision-making precisely because it does not distinguish people’s *ability* to pay versus their *willingness* to pay, and consequently privileges those who have higher incomes.²⁷⁹ Markets, unlike democratic political institutions, are unconcerned with equity and are instead governed by profits. As long as businesses are able to reach their profit quotas and satisfy their investors, they will continue their practices, irrespective of distributional inequity. But because food is a necessity that cannot be forgone, marginalized consumers are subjected to an exploitative and coercive market

²⁷⁷ World Bank, “Poverty Overview,” accessed April 7, 2013, <http://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/poverty/overview>.

²⁷⁸ Viertel, “Beyond Voting With Your Fork: From Enlightened Eating to Movement Building,” 141.

²⁷⁹ Anderson, *Value and Ethics in Economics*, 193-194.

system of governance. All too often, people are coerced into purchasing foods that are unhealthy and culturally inappropriate given the social and economic inequities of our increasingly market oriented society. For these reasons, the “vote with your fork” election is rigged, which is why the incumbent processed and fast food industries have remained in power for so long.²⁸⁰

Democratic freedoms, on the other hand, empower community members to participate equally and collectively to establish norms and entitlements, which almost certainly includes an entitlement to food.²⁸¹ In genuine democracies, public officials, if they are to retain legitimacy, must recognize their citizens equally and respect their collective decisions, regardless of their socioeconomic or cultural background.

Consequently, I argue that only democracies can ensure true procedural justice, because as Sen suggests, this is the only form of government that remains accountable to its constituents’ food needs regardless of socioeconomic standing.²⁸² If universal entitlement to sufficient quantities of safe, healthy, and culturally appropriate foods is desired, then it is necessary to adopt a form of democratic governance over the food system that upholds procedural justice as the food democracy/sovereignty movements suggest.

Recognizably, though, many governments (particularly democracies) do provide food entitlements to marginalized individuals and families to address the

²⁸⁰ Viertel, “Beyond Voting With Your Fork: From Enlightened Eating to Movement Building,” 141.

²⁸¹ Anderson, *Value and Ethics in Economics*, 159.

²⁸² Sen, *Development as Freedom*, 178.

distributive injustices inherent in the completely commodified food system. Food vouchers and food entitlement programs (although not entirely sufficient) help mitigate the entitlement failures associated with distributive injustice, and allow consumers to better exercise their market freedoms and “vote with their forks.” But even if these food entitlement programs granted all citizens with the means to “vote with their forks” (which is still far from the case), markets would still fail to address the recognitional injustice that is inherent to a completely commodified system. As explained in Chapter Four, the complete commodification of food results in corruptive institutions that fail to fully recognize cultural norms and ideals surrounding food, even in conditions of economic equality. Furthermore, these programs fail to address the procedural injustices within the completely commodified food system, as equal political recognition is a precondition for procedural justice. Consequently, by working within the market system, these programs fail to address both the recognitional and procedural injustices that are inherent to the completely commodified system, and instead merely ensure “*food security*.”

Food Security and Food Sovereignty

Although the formal definition of “food security” varies, it is commonly understood as follows: “a situation that exists when all people, at all times, have physical, social and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food that meets

their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life.”²⁸³ While this definition from the FAO may seem laudable, food security nonetheless remains problematic as it fails to address how food security is to be achieved. The concept of “food security” merely states that people have access to “sufficient, safe, and nutritious foods,” but fails to specify who defines what such an entitlement might exactly entail. As food justice scholar and activist Raj Patel illustrates, one can be imprisoned or under the rule of a dictator and still be food secure, and yet still have his or her food culture or practices go unrecognized.²⁸⁴ Or, as is the case in the completely commodified food system, food security can be achieved even with the government providing vouchers to McDonalds and access to Monsanto GM seeds. In this regard, the concept of food security remains insufficient for realizing genuine food justice as it fails to address the lack of social control over the food system. This failure to recognize cultural norms and ideals surrounding food, thus results in both procedural and recognitional injustice.

As compared with food security, food sovereignty, directly addresses equal political recognition of food cultures and equal political participation as a critical component of a just food system. Via Campesina’s definition of food sovereignty: “the right of each nation to maintain and develop its own capacity to produce its basic foods respecting cultural and productive diversity,”²⁸⁵ stresses the right of

²⁸³ Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), *State of Food Insecurity 2001*, Rome: Food and Agricultural Organization of the United Nations, (2001), <http://www.fao.org/docrep/003/y1500e/y1500e00.htm>.

²⁸⁴ Raj Patel, “Food Sovereignty,” *Journal of Peasant Studies* 36, no. 3 (2009): 663–706, doi:10.1080/03066150903143079.

²⁸⁵ Via Campesina, “The right to produce and access to land.”

communities to define their own food systems based on a process of discursive pluralism that recognizes “cultural and productive diversity.” Under food sovereignty, respect and recognition of a society’s food cultures and agricultural traditions are realized through procedural justice. Food sovereignty understands that food systems can only be made accountable to the community members they serve when all constituents have a chance to voice their preferences and ideals, irrespective of their socio-economic standing. In this regard, procedural justice as advocated by the food sovereignty movement, is a critical component in generating a just and legitimate food system that affirms both human dignity and economic necessity.

Enterprise Zones, and Food Vouchers, and Domestic Food Security

As of 2007, seven countries, Mali, Senegal, Ecuador, Venezuela, Bolivia, Nicaragua, and Nepal, have all recognized the importance of food sovereignty in realizing genuine food justice by incorporating food sovereignty language into their constitutions, policies, or mission statements.²⁸⁶ In contrast, the US government, in an effort to merely achieve greater food security, has instead taken steps to prop up the completely commodified food system through various food entitlement programs. In particular, many local governments use voucher programs and enterprise zones to work through the completely commodified food system and to ensure greater food security. Enterprise zones are geographical areas in which zoning policies offer tax

²⁸⁶ Gottlieb and Joshi, *Food Justice*, 117.

concessions and other infrastructure incentives to encourage grocers to expand into low-income neighborhoods.²⁸⁷ In addition to these enterprise zones, the federal government supports various food voucher programs, including the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), and the Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) special supplemental nutrient program.²⁸⁸ But while these enterprise zones and voucher programs can help mitigate distributive injustices and reduce overall food insecurity in providing greater physical and economic access to grocery stores and food, these policies nonetheless fail to directly address the recognitional or procedural injustices inherent to the completely commodified food system. Instead, these programs merely support the completely commodified food system and ensure the further dominance of corporately owned food retailers and agribusinesses.

While intended for the purposes of achieving greater food security, enterprise zones and food vouchers greatly assist large publicly traded food retailers (such as Wal-Mart) further their economic interests. And although some small independent grocers and farmers' markets benefit from enterprise zone legislation and food vouchers, more commonly, these programs primarily assist large publicly traded food retailers expand their market share into former food deserts and maximize profits.²⁸⁹ Such developments are problematic because, unlike farmers or independent grocers who are directly implicated in the cultural norms of the community they serve, publicly traded food retailers are governed principally by market norms, and primarily

²⁸⁷ Alan H Peters and Peter S. Fisher, *State Enterprise Zone Programs: Have They Worked?* (Kalamazoo, MI: W.E. Upjohn Institute for Employment Research, 2002).

²⁸⁸ "Food and Nutrition Service," accessed April 7, 2013, <http://www.fns.usda.gov/>.

²⁸⁹ Alan H Peters and Peter S. Fisher, *State Enterprise Zone Programs: Have They Worked?*, 14.

recognize the interests of corporate executives and shareholders rather than the interests of the consumers they allegedly serve.

Recognizably, corporations are influenced by consumers' purchasing decisions, and food vouchers help further democratize this influence in allowing marginalized individuals to more easily "vote with their fork." But consumers are not as free or influential as corporations may lead them to believe. Despite what FDA and USDA food labels may advertise, purchases are confined to foods that are produced by the completely commodified food system. Consequently, it is impossible to outvote the inherently corruptive aspects embodied by the current food system, simply because the notion of an uncommodified food system cannot be made "for sale" on supermarket shelves. So even if enterprise zones and food voucher programs allow consumers greater market freedom to make purchases according to their preferences (which is still decidedly far from the case), these market-oriented programs are nonetheless confining as they merely support the continuance of a completely commodified food system that leaves food cultures and traditional agriculture practices unrecognized. Instead, these enterprise zones and food voucher programs merely prop the completely commodified food system and further perpetuate an alienating consumerist mentality towards food and its consumption.

Feed the Future and International Food Security

In the case of international food aid, the US government collaborates with big agribusiness, such as Monsanto, to increase the physical access and affordability of their products. In doing so, the government hopes to correct the distributive injustices associated with the completely commodified food system and ensure greater global food security. Historically, international food security initiatives included campaigns such as Green Revolution. But the most recent of these initiatives includes the State Department's "Feed the Future" campaign, which in 2010 pledged 3.5 billion dollars over the next three years for greater agricultural development and food security to the developing world.²⁹⁰ But despite the program's noble goal to ensure greater global food security, Feed the Future's focus on private partnerships and biotechnology suggests a concerning lack of recognition for existing food cultures and traditional forms of agriculture.²⁹¹

Although Feed the Future successfully addresses entitlement failures in these regions by extending economic aid and resources to farmers in the developing world, it fails to embrace existing community networks of farmers or to assist them in maximizing their own local seed varieties through agroecologically sound methods of farming, as the IAASTD report advises. Feed the Future instead relies on partnerships with private corporations and biotechnology firms like Monsanto to

²⁹⁰ Feed the Future, "Feed the Future Guide," (May 2010), accessed April 7, 2013, <http://www.feedthefuture.gov/>.

²⁹¹ Scott Lensing, "Congress Discusses Ways to 'Feed the Future'," *Food First Institute for Food and Development Policy*, July 21, 2010, <http://www.foodfirst.org/en/node/3035>.

provide genetically modified seeds, agricultural inputs, and financing to farmers in the developing world.²⁹² While these partnerships greatly benefit American companies' economic interests by helping them expand their market share abroad, they only further subjugate farmers in the developing world to an alienating and unsustainable completely commodified food system.

This market-oriented approach toward food security is problematic because it fails to recognize traditional food cultures and modes of production, or grant social control to the communities it allegedly serves. Unlike community networks of farmers, which are implicated within the cultural norms of the societies they feed, multinational agribusinesses firms are instead motivated exclusively by profit, and recognize primarily the interests of their shareholders rather than the interests of the farmers they ostensibly serve. And so, while Feed the Future may help farmers in the developing world become more food secure, these farmers are nonetheless still further subjugated to an expensive and unsustainable program of industrial agriculture that is insensitive to traditional forms of agriculture and food cultures. In doing so, Feed the Future, and food security campaigns like it, have exported a corruptive and alienating Western food system that is both ecologically unsound and detrimental to people's health. In this regard, the Feed the Future program, like so many other neocolonial food security initiatives before it, merely strengthens the corporate hold over the completely commodified food system rather than address it as the source of food insecurity.

²⁹² *Ibid.*

Food Sovereignty as a Precondition for Food Security

In order for food security to be achieved long-term, the food system must be democratized and protected by rights, accountable to those who are directly affected by the food system. According to Via Campesina, food sovereignty is a precondition for food security. In their 1996 Declaration of food sovereignty, Via Campesina argues: “food security cannot be achieved without taking full account of those who produce food. Any discussion that ignores our contribution will fail to eradicate poverty and hunger.”²⁹³ According to Via Campesina, governments must recognize the of diversity food cultures and agricultural practices of those who are directly affected by the food system, and empower these individuals to govern their own food system democratically in accordance with these ideals so as to achieve lasting food security.

As previously discussed, democracy plays an important protective role in preventing food insecurity, and this is because in democracies, public officials must recognize and respond to the needs and desires of its citizenry in order to retain legitimacy.²⁹⁴ But this responsibility extends beyond merely ensuring that everyone has enough to eat. If food security is to be understood as “a situation that exists when all people, at all times, have physical, social and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food that meets their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life,” then true food sovereignty is undeniably a prerequisite.

²⁹³ Via Campesina, “The right to produce and access to land.”

²⁹⁴ Sen, *Development as Freedom*, 178.

In order to ensure that food is “safe and nutritious” or that it “meets [people’s] food preferences” the food system must democratize and remain sovereign from the completely commodified food system, and instead embrace the diversity of food cultures within its constituency. As explained in chapter 4, the completely commodified food system corrupts food such that it is no longer “safe or nutritious.” The rampant onset of foodborne illness and diet related disease associated with the Western diet suggest that the present completely commodified food system cannot ensure this aspect of food security. Moreover, the completely commodified food system corrupts foods spiritually such that it no longer meets consumers’ existential “food preferences,” despite what labels may lead customers to believe. Lastly, the ecological degradation associated with the completely commodified food system threatens the long-term food security of the planet. Only through traditional, sustainable agroecological methods of agricultural will long-term food security be achieved.²⁹⁵ In this regard, food sovereignty must be further understood as a critical component of achieving long-term food security for the health and well being of both people and the planet.

Conclusion

Food sovereignty and food democracy are critical movements that strive for greater procedural justice within the food system. Although the market based “vote

²⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

with your fork” model contends that consumers influence the food system democratically through their purchases, markets do not realize genuine procedural justice as they inhibit low-income individuals from participating in decision-making processes regarding the food system. On the other hand, food democracy allows everyone who is affected by the food system, regardless of socioeconomic standing, to have a voice in the distributions of food in society, and thereby enhances distributive justice. Moreover, food sovereignty, unlike government backed food security initiatives, recognizes the diversity of cultures and backgrounds held by all of its constituents in decision-making processes regarding the food system, and thus upholds principles of recognitional justice. In this regard, procedural justice as advocated by the food democracy/sovereignty movements, links the recognitional justices that are upheld by the locavore and slow food movements, with the distributive justice values of the food justice movement, and is therefore a critical component in realizing and sustaining a food system that affirms a complete understanding of justice: distributive, recognitional, and procedural.

Conclusion

Why have modern food movements become so popular? Are they due to absolute shortage of food supplies on the one hand, and an elitist obsession with local and organic foods on the other? Or are they, as this thesis has argued, a collective consequence of the complete commodification of food resources, the result of the distributive, procedural, and recognitional injustice that it produces. Although the food justice and local food movements are typically perceived as at odds with one another, with mutually opposing aims, this thesis concludes that these are not rival movements, and instead share a unified defiance against the prevailing completely commodified food system.

To substantiate this claim, this thesis has endeavored to accomplish two principal tasks. For one, it has attempted to demonstrate how food has become completely commodified, which has in turn resulted in various forms of injustice. Currently, food is still merely regarded as a commodity, even among political theorists of commodification. Although these theorists do not directly address food in their analyses of commodification and injustice, I nonetheless claim that food as a unique good – one that is intertwined in personal and cultural identities and imbued with great significance as a physiological necessity – is relevant to their discussions. As explained, it is not objectionable that people pay for food. Food benefits from aspects of markets, including consumer sovereignty, economic efficiency, and professional autonomy. What is instead objectionable is the corporate dominance over the food

system and the loss of autonomy associated with this takeover. It is this market dominance, or rather complete commodification, to which food movements object.

The second, and perhaps primary objective of this thesis, however, is to reveal the unified nature of these seemingly divergent food movements. So far, the food movement has suffered from ideological fragmentation and seemingly conflicting internal interests. However, as long as each movement views the other as ‘other,’ the food movement will remain stagnant. The status quo cannot be changed unless these fragmented movements – from bread riots to locavorism – forge a common ground, or rather what Samir Amin in *Food Movements Unite!* refers to as “convergence in diversity.”²⁹⁶ Once the relationship between these seemingly conflicting food movements is better understood, food activists from the bread rioter, to the concerned mom, to the peasant farmer, can come to view the food movement holistically as a collective effort towards a unified end: to dismantle the completely commodified food system and reclaim the right to collectively define their own *partially* commodified food systems.

In order for justice to be achieved, food must cease to be regarded as a complete commodity, subject entirely to market norms and the profit motive. Instead, food must be understood as a partially commodified good, governed democratically by the cultural norms of the people it serves under principles of food sovereignty, free from the coercive and corruptive effects of complete commodification. Understanding

²⁹⁶ Samir Amin, “Food Sovereignty: A Struggle for Convergence in Diversity,” preface to *Food Movements Unite! Strategies to Transform our Food Systems*, ed. by Eric Holt-Giménez (Oakland, Food First Books, 2011), xvii.

food in this way as a partial commodity allows societies to retain the benefits of markets, while still holding the food system accountable to the interests of those it serves rather than to corporate CEOs or investors.

In a partially commodified food system, farmers must be seen as autonomous professionals. Just like doctors and educators, farmers are critical to society as they are responsible for the nutritional and spiritual welfare of society. As such, farmers ought to benefit from the same respect and autonomy as other professionals who have remained in the non-profit sector. Farmers must be able to control the production and distribution of their crops in a way that upholds the non-market ideals of their profession and the communities they serve. Although independent farmers are susceptible to greed and corruption themselves, they are nonetheless implicated within the social norms and context of the community, which often hold professionals accountable. In traditional societies, informal modes of collective self-management may be sufficient for holding farmers accountable to the needs and interests of society. But in industrialized societies, this accountability system can be further codified in a democratic institution of policy and decision-making, which have now become known as food policy councils.

Food policy councils democratize the food system in allowing community members to gather in a forum to discuss how to operate and manage the local food system.²⁹⁷ Ideally, these councils include a broad range of stakeholders, including

²⁹⁷ Alethea Harper, Annie Shattuck, Eric Holt-Giménez, Alison Alkon, and Frances Lambrick, "Food Policy Councils: Lessons Learned, Executive Summary," *Food First: Institute for Food and*

farmers, food retailers, public officials, anti-hunger activists and the everyday food consumer. This dialogue, in turn, fosters communication and relationships between these various actors within the food system, and holds each sector accountable to the non-market cultural norms and ideals that the community shares. In addition to community building, food policy councils often codify these relationships and cultural norms into policy and support programs in order to address the community's needs.²⁹⁸ These community managed food systems can be further enhanced by public-public partnerships that promote greater intermunicipal cooperation, interregional trade agreements, and bulk purchasing syndicates, all of which can help improve quality of service and reduce costs.

Procedural justice, as advocated by the food democracy movement, is critical, as it enables people's different food cultures to be recognized regardless of their socio-economic background, and ensures the distribution of both economic entitlement and political right to food. But like markets, democracy is recognizably no panacea. Genuine democracy does not function particularly well in large groups, and while representative democracies are good substitutes, it is necessary to retain active participation from people.²⁹⁹ But because food is so central to life, I argue that it is not inconceivable that such political participation could be realized. After all, the surge of food movements indicates greater political participation and increased interest in rectifying the coercive and corruptive aspects of the now completely commodified

Development Policy, (2009): 2, accessed April 7, 2013, <http://www.foodfirst.org/en/foodpolicycouncils-lessons>.

²⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹⁹ Anderson, *Value and Ethics in Economics*, 148.

food system. Moreover, because food is a universal human need, it is conveniently a great way of bringing people together and encouraging political discourse.

Food is a great unifier as it brings people and communities together. Public spaces, such as farmers' markets and shared meals, foster trust and civility within a community, which is essential for a healthy democracy. As former president of Slow Food USA, Josh Viertel, conjectures: "Once you've shared a meal with someone, or worked on a project together, you view each other differently. You're more likely to take care of each other, and, I believe, you're more likely to stand together and work for change together."³⁰⁰ Over a meal, or through an interaction at the market, people exchange their thoughts and attitudes of public affairs, engaging in meaningful political discourse that makes them feel a sense of community and connectivity. This connectivity, in turn, inspires social change. These interactions serve as the source for social and political activism surrounding the present completely commodified food system. But perhaps more importantly, these interactions also serve as the solution for sustained political participation and food democracy – and thereby genuine food justice. The food movement will only achieve genuine food justice once the disparate stakeholders recognize their common goal and work together to democratize the food system in this manner.

As food for thought, I would like to further suggest that the present food movement, just as in food movements past, raises questions that extend beyond the scope of food. In particular, I question whether the modern food movement challenges

³⁰⁰ Josh Viertel "Beyond Voting With Your Fork: From Enlightened Eating to Movement Building," 143.

the overarching tenets of free market neoliberalism and metrics of value that are based in economic profit. Food movements are recognizably merely one potent manifestation of popular discontent with the encroaching complete commodification of every aspect of daily life. The complete historical, political, and social factors that are involved in fomenting social change and political movements are admittedly diverse and complex and consequently beyond the scope of this paper. However, I propose that food, as an essential human need and tangible symbol of community and culture is uniquely situated to inform and mobilize social change as well as reform the distributional, recognitional, and procedural injustices that are associated with the increasing commodification of our everyday lives, and the prevailing neoliberal market-oriented political-economic order. This topic is admittedly beyond the scope of this thesis, but a future investigation of the present food movement's impact on political and economic change could be illuminating.

In closing, I would like to suggest that the food movement is like a garden. Gardeners prepare the land and plant the seeds while the soil, weeds, and insects do the rest. Like a garden, food activists along with civil society must come together and plant the seeds of knowledge and cultivate discussions of effective governance. Genuine food justice will only be harvested once all community members who are affected by the food system are able to participate in the decisions regarding the production, distribution, and consumption of food. As Candide concludes:

We must cultivate our garden.

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