

**AN ETHNOGRAPHY OF FOOD BANKS IN WINNIPEG:
ORGANIZATIONS AS ADAPTATIONS
TO POVERTY AND HUNGER**

BY

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A Thesis

Submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies
In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

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**An Ethnography of Food Banks in Winnipeg:
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George Nikou

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ABSTRACT

This thesis, *An Ethnography of Food Banks in Winnipeg: Organizations as Adaptations to Poverty and Hunger*, attempts to address the problems of poverty and hunger in Canada, specifically in the city of Winnipeg. This thesis is a study that goes beyond simple descriptions of activities and events and attempts to demonstrate how food banks have become adaptations to poverty and hunger. Using various Winnipeg food banks as case examples, this thesis analyzes how food banks supplement individuals' and families' infrequent or sporadic abilities to access the supermarket, which is the dominant form of food distribution in this country. As an ethnography it will try and provide a holistic view of food banks and the experiences and reactions of the various groups and individuals to the problems of poverty and hunger. The methodologies used in this thesis are: participant observation, a survey of a small sample of food bank clients conducted at the front-line food banks, and interviews with key informants. These charitable organizations have developed and become established over the last twenty years and have become a necessity to many people, especially those who are long time recipients of welfare. Furthermore, it can be argued that food banks have become an unofficial extension of the welfare system in Winnipeg and Canada. Food banks have become a supplementary form of food distribution, a way to alleviate unnecessary hunger for those who are poor, in a wealthy country such as Canada. Thus, the people who establish food banks and those who make use of them are adapting to the problems that occur in many stratified societies, in this case procuring food from an alternative form of distribution to alleviate hunger.

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The writing of a thesis can at times be a lonely pursuit. Many hours are spent writing, thinking, and re-writing, often times in solitude with only books, notes, and thoughts to keep one company. However, my Anthropology experience at the University of Manitoba, from the beginning of my Masters program to the final draft of this thesis, was not one of a lonely researcher out in the field; it was an experience of a student who tried to learn as much as possible from all those people who came into my life during the years I spent in Winnipeg.

Since this thesis is an Ethnography about food banks in Winnipeg I would like to begin by thanking all those people at the food banks I spent time at, especially those at Winnipeg Harvest and the front-line food banks. Although you shall remain nameless to maintain your privacy, I thank the people who I met, spoke with, interviewed, surveyed, volunteered with, and had the patience to put up with a struggling first time researcher in the field. To them I owe everything because it is their lives I have attempted to write about. I only wish I could have done a better job.

I would like to thank my committee members, D. Stymeist (Anthropology), L. Driedger (Sociology), and S. Frankel (Social Work) who all took the time and had the patience to read and comment on my thesis. I would especially like to thank my advisor, Jean-Luc Chodkiewicz, who not only guided me through this thesis and put up with me, but who has influenced me to see and appreciate the discipline of Anthropology in a new light. Professor Chodkiewicz's enthusiasm for knowledge inspired me to keep pushing forward and my time spent with him has been one of the purest forms of education I have ever experienced. Thank you.

I met many people in Winnipeg: some were students, some teachers, some Winnipegers and Manitobans by birth, and others like myself, newcomers to the city. In the end I made many good friends and it was their support that helped me through the hard times and it was their friendship that made my stay enjoyable. I would like to thank all the students I met during the Masters program who made the experience an enlightening one.

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PREFACE

"I'll never look at food the same way again."

Food bank was a term I had never really heard before I began this thesis. Poverty and hunger, on the other hand, along with the various methods used to alleviate these problems, such as charity, alms, aid, and welfare, were terms I knew but never fully thought through or comprehended. It was not until I began volunteering at Winnipeg Harvest, the main-line food bank in the city of Winnipeg, as part of a class assignment in Applied Anthropology with Professor John Matthiasson that I “discovered,” or became “aware” of, food banks.

I say “aware” because, like poverty and hunger, food banks existed before academics and journalists alike began “discovering,” researching, and writing about them; it is the people who establish organizations such as food banks and soup kitchens that discover there is a need for them. The people who make use of them are the ones who discover that they exist and can be utilized to their benefit. It is the researchers, policy makers, and politicians who often forget or take for granted the people they write about or represent, and they can unfortunately add to their problems rather than alleviate them.

Through second and third hand sources and casual conversations I became aware of food banks and like many students of anthropology I “fell” into my subject. Through the efforts of the staff and volunteers at Winnipeg Harvest I was allowed to enter the world of food banks, not just as a volunteer but also as a researcher. My experience with food banks in Winnipeg lead me to a greater awareness of the issues of food, poverty, hunger, Canadian economics and politics, religion, and voluntarism. My heightened

awareness of these issues, through first hand experiences, observations, and background literature research, provided me with many new insights. I have unfortunately come to the conclusion that food banks have become a necessity for many of the poor in Canadian society.

Food banks are a partial reflection of present day Canadian society; at least in terms of how our society deals with its impoverished citizens and the hunger they experience. To the organizers and clients of food banks these organizations are seen as a necessity because the formal methods of alleviating poverty within Canada, such as welfare, employment insurance, and employment opportunities, are (seen as) inadequate. Thus there is a need for alternative methods of food distribution to provide supplementary food for people to ease their burden of poverty.

I began this section by stating: "*I'll never look at food the same way again.*" I say this because I grew up without any personal fear of going hungry and always had an abundant quantity and quality of food available to me. After witnessing hunger and poverty first hand in a land of plenty, with people lining up for unwanted or donated food, I started to realize how much we take for granted that which not only gives us life to survive, but thrive. It also made me realize that anyone could one day be at the receiving end of a soup ladle in some inner-city soup kitchen or lining up once or twice a month for a two or three day supply of damaged, unwanted, or stale groceries in the basement of a church run food bank.

I introduce my thesis in this manner not to try and romanticize or embellish the situation, but to provide a glimpse of what I have seen and experienced. The following

account of food banks in Winnipeg is as accurate a portrayal as I have been able to provide and all interpretations and errors are my own.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

I)	Abstract	
II)	Acknowledgements	
III)	Preface	
VI)	Table Of Contents	
	Introduction	Page 1
	Chapter 1: Review Of Literature	Page 35
	Chapter 2: Inequality, Poverty, Welfare, & The Rise Of Food Banks In Canada	Page 63
	Chapter 3: Main Line Food Banks: Winnipeg Harvest, The Egalitarian Redistributors	Page 88
	Chapter 4: Front Line Food Banks: Food For The Body, Food For The Soul	Page 127
	Chapter 5: The Survey: A Profile Of Food Bank Clients	Page 147
	Chapter 6: The People: Food Bank Clients & Service Providers	Page 162
	Conclusion: The McDonaldization Of The First World Food System & How Food Banks Are A Symbol of Of Its Failure	Page 184B
	Appendix A	Page 200
	Appendix B	Page 209
	References Cited	Page 213

INTRODUCTION

There is an irony in Canada that borders on the absurd. This is a nation that consistently ranks in the top ten countries to live in. It has one of the highest standards of living with some of the richest resources available. With its relatively small population of approximately thirty-two million people, Canada is a country that should not have a problem feeding its people properly. If managed properly, the agricultural production of a wide variety of foodstuffs in this country can provide an appropriate quantity and quality of nutritious foods for large populations over long periods of time.

The irony and absurdity lie in the fact that since the first food bank opened up in Edmonton in 1981 (Riches, 1986:14) there has been a steady increase in the number of these organizations that donate food to those who ask for it. Charity, soup kitchens, bread lines, and the donation of food to “the poor” have been around a lot longer than food banks, yet the distribution of food through food banks takes on a new meaning in an affluent and democratic society. The fact that Canadian supermarkets are able to stock their shelves with the four basic food groups along with non-essential food stuffs and exotic foods from around the world is evidence of this.

In this time of plenty food banks have continually grown and have trouble stocking their own shelves, let alone providing an adequate long-term supply of nutritious foods for their clients. It can be argued that the food system in Canada is not geared towards feeding people, but to create a profit for those in the business of producing and selling food. A two-tiered food system has thus become established, one for profit and a charitable one for survival. Consequently, a maldistribution of resources is occurring, skewed in favour of the “haves” with the money to buy food discriminating against the “have-nots,” those with limited means to buy a good quantity and quality of food on a consistent basis.

The dominant method of food procurement for consumers in Canada is through financial transactions at supermarkets, restaurants, corner stores, farmers' markets, and so on; and for the most part only those with money can buy food. Those who do not earn enough money to purchase adequate amounts of food and/or whose social support networks (ie. government aid, families, or friends) are unable to provide food or money must find alternative methods to secure food. One method is the use of food banks.

This thesis is an ethnography of food banks in the city of Winnipeg, Canada. It is a study that goes beyond simple descriptions of activities and events and attempts to demonstrate how food banks have become adaptations to poverty and hunger in Canada. Using various Winnipeg food banks as case examples, this thesis will analyze how food banks supplement individuals' and families' infrequent or sporadic abilities to access supermarkets, which are the dominant form of food distribution in this country. As an ethnography it will try and provide a holistic view of food banks and the experiences and reactions of the various groups and individuals to the problems of poverty and hunger. Specifically, the ideological positions, motivations, and views of the staff and volunteers, as well as food bank clients, of food banks and their participation in them are prevalent and presented throughout the thesis. These peoples' views are quoted and commented upon throughout the thesis and are a major basis of analysis to help support the argument that food banks are adaptations to poverty and hunger. This ethnography shows the impact of over twenty years of growing inequality and poverty and the systemic problems of the welfare system in Canada and how these problems have lead to the growth in the number of and use of food banks.

Within the Canadian context it appears that food banks are a type of adaptation to poverty and hunger and a reaction to socio-economic inequality and the poverty that stems from it. The causes of poverty include the political-economic framework shaped

by Canadian post-industrial capitalism, welfare policies, the growing economic income gap, unstable employment opportunities, and a profit oriented food distribution system that affects the ability of the Canadian poor to fully or consistently use the supermarket to feed themselves.

The problems of poverty and hunger in Canada are currently being addressed by charitable organizations, such as food banks, which are “band-aid” solutions to Canadian social, political, and economic problems. Furthermore, through default, food banks have become an extension of the welfare system in Canada that is failing its citizens. These very real “Canadian problems” have lead to a proliferation of food banks across the country. As of September 1999, there were 698 food banks in Canada. This figure does not necessarily include the numerous soup kitchens, meal programs, or the front-line food banks/member agencies that can number into the hundreds throughout Canada. In March 1999, 790,344 people used a food bank in Canada. This number is up substantially from a decade ago when in the same month only 378,000 people used a food bank (Canadian Association of Food Banks, September 1999). These statistics are remarkable, especially when compared to those of a profitable organization such as McDonald’s Restaurants. The number of food banks in Canada is rivaling the number of McDonald’s restaurants. As of October 1998 there were of 1000 McDonald’s restaurants in Canada that served close to three million people daily (McDonald’s, October 1998:1). At first glance, it may seem strange to compare food banks to McDonald’s restaurants, yet the alarming number of food banks and people using food banks in one month raises the issue of food security, or lack of it, for certain portions of the population (ie. the poor) in Canada.

Food banks aid in keeping poverty and hunger at bay. However, food banks differ from other kinds of food charity, especially past and current forms such as soup kitchens. This new form of food charity is different because poverty and hunger in

Canada have taken on new meanings; this is not because the definitions of these terms have changed, but because poverty and hunger affect a greater number of people and is moving upwards on the socio-economic scale. Or looked at another way, more Canadians are falling further down the socio-economic scale. There is evidence, for example Yalnizyan's (1996) study of the shrinking middle class in Canada from the years 1973 to 1996, that supports the claim that there is a rise of inequality and poverty in Canada over the last 29 years. (The argument of growing inequality and poverty in Canada is developed further in Chapter 2.)

Food banks serve more people now than when they were first established. These people are not just the homeless or unemployed, but also the working poor and middle class. Food banks also differ because of how they function. The food is not prepared and served to individuals as in soup kitchens. The food is distributed, as fairly as possible, in its unprepared forms (ie. canned soups, pastas, rice, bread) so that individuals can take the food home and prepare it themselves. The place where the food is picked up varies. Some food banks are run out of community centres, others out of church basements. An entire network of food distribution points exist getting food from the donating parties (ie. individuals, businesses, etc.), to a sortation area (ie. the main-line food bank), to a front-line food bank, and finally into the hands of the clients. No longer are the "hungry" in Canada the "marginalized" homeless who are relegated to just the soup kitchens run by individual churches in "urban ghettos" or "skid row" missions. The numbers of poor and hungry have grown and now are becoming a part of a complex and even bureaucratic charitable food distribution system relying on donated surplus food from food banks that are becoming more visible in Canadian society.

Regardless of the factors involved in the rise of food banks over the last twenty years, and whether food banks should be a charitable or social justice concern, they are

nonetheless a reaction or “adaptation” to the serious human problems of poverty and hunger. The adaptation to poverty and hunger in this case is a conscious effort on the part of groups and individuals to deal with these issues. It is people’s actions, partly in instances of human distress or disturbance, that lead them to organize, even if it means running non-profit food banks with limited budgets that go against the goals and values of the dominant profit-oriented food system of North America. “To adapt then, is not to do so perfectly from some objective standpoint, or even necessarily to improve performance: it is to do as well as possible under the circumstances, which may not turn out very well at all” (Sahlins, 1964:137).

In the specific context of food banks in Winnipeg, adaptation should be seen from a humanistic perspective; as a reaction from a group of people, either from a religious or social justice perspective or both, to certain injustices they feel are occurring and their decision to do something about them. The ultimate goal of food banks is not their own survival, but working towards closing down. At the same time the people working at the food banks strive towards aiding others to hopefully thrive and flourish in all areas of human life.

As humans we have culture, “the body of learned beliefs, traditions, and guides for behaviour that are shared among members of any society” (Barrett, 1984:54), but a culture is never static or unchanging. Every culture changes over time, place, and at all levels of society. Through what people have learned from their culture(s), or at least particular aspects of it, various members of a society will attempt to oppose those facets of their own culture that they might find unfair or immoral and proceed to try and change them. In the sub-culture of food banks the short-term goals of the volunteers and workers are to supply as much food as possible as a supplement to those who need it the most and their charitable actions are often done in a humane and respectful fashion. The long-term

goal is to shut down without having their clients still needing their services. This is done through their own political activism or that of other poverty activist groups working on their behalf. Food banks stay open and are being used by those who need them. A paradox thus exists of having food banks stay open, which is in direct opposition to their final goal of ending emergency food programs. To stay open only perpetuates a well-meaning but “ineffective” means of distributing inappropriate quantities and (and sometimes quality) of food inconsistently; but to close before other “better” measures are put into place (ie. better welfare benefits, higher wages, etc.) would mean having people struggle even more without the aid of food banks.

As an ethnography of food banks in Winnipeg and how they are adaptations to poverty and hunger, it is a delicate balance between the micro and the macro, between structure and agency, “the relationship between individual responsibility and social constraints” (Bourgois, 1996:17). The ethnography, anthropology’s trademark form of documentation, is the culmination of a researcher’s work in the field. It comes in many forms, from the personal/autobiographical, to thick description, to explanatory research. In this ethnography I will try to put a human face to the problems of poverty and hunger in Winnipeg while claiming that the problems faced by the poor are not necessarily self-inflicted. Some people are more privileged than others (ie. born to rich families, good work and educational opportunities, etc.) and although personal choices, preferences, and actions do play roles in everyone’s life, the structures of Canadian society are such that inequality exists and is the basis for the poverty, hunger, and rise of food banks in this country.

At least from an anthropological perspective, the attempt to understand food banks, their clients, the poor, and hungry stems from the “fundamental anthropological tenet of cultural relativism: cultures are never good or bad; they simply have an internal

logic” (Bourgois, 1996:15). Cultural relativism, if taken to extremes can unfortunately lead to a researcher favouring the people in his or her own study and/or at the same time these people being studied can be criticized by an unforgiving public. Thus, it is imperative to keep in mind that when dealing with individuals in a study that deals with sensitive issues (ie. poverty, racism, oppression) the experiences and choices made by people have to be understood within the greater context of social constraints (Bourgois, 1996:15) rather than from a strictly “blame the victim” mentality. At the same time the researcher or reader does not necessarily have to be an apologist for the views or actions of the people who have been studied. Hence, a balance must be struck.

THE UNHOLY TRINITY: POVERTY, FOOD, & HUNGER

This thesis, in general, is about poverty, food, and hunger. These three factors throughout much of human history, and up to the present time, have made up a sort of “unholy trinity.” It is a trinity because the three often cannot be separated one from another. They can be intimately tied together because hunger is a lack of food and the two are often associated with poverty; and any analysis of one usually leads to a discussion of the other two, either directly or indirectly. The “trinity” is “unholy” or “unjust” because there are those in Canada who are in disadvantaged or vulnerable positions that cannot access the abundant resources available in this rich, overdeveloped, Westernized country to provide them with a decent quality of life.

Quality of life, at least in terms of the basic necessities of life (food, clothing, and shelter), is the ability of an individual or group of persons to access the proper quantity and quality of basic necessities of life without duress. This means not compromising their economic, political, social, or cultural standing in their adopted or native society so they will be able to not only survive, but thrive as members of their society.

Unfortunately, many Canadians are not able to achieve a quality of life that is appropriate or even healthy for such a rich country. These people are the lower-class or under-class which includes those who are unemployed, underemployed, disabled, mentally ill, working poor, or just plain poor. Often times these people are blamed for their lot in life and a “blame the victim” mentality can take place without a thorough understanding of the precedents that have lead these people to the position they are in now.

Poverty manifests itself in many facets of peoples’ lives often in the form of hunger. Hunger, simply defined, refers to the lack of a quantity and/or quality of food. The forms that hunger takes vary: such as malnutrition (“an imbalance—a deficiency or an excess—in a person’s intake of nutrients and other dietary elements needed for healthy living”) (Gardner & Halweil, 2000:10), undernutrition (“total daily caloric intake of food does not provide minimum requirements of energy”) (Borgstrom, 1973:53), or a combination of the two. However, hunger is much more complex than deficiencies of calories and nutrients. It is determined by the social and cultural, and sometimes ecological, situation. The most severe form of hunger is starvation, usually during famine situations. In Colin Turnbull’s *The Mountain People* (1972), one can read about the starvation of the Ik and its devastating effects on normal social and cultural patterns and human behaviours. Through no fault of their own these hunter-gatherers were relocated to an agricultural wasteland in Uganda where they were reduced to human scavengers barely able to survive. According to Turnbull’s (1972:260-261) account:

The Ik had a nice sense of timing in such matters, and the joking relationship between alternate generations made good use of it. It was rather commonplace, during the second year’s drought, to see the very young prying open the mouths of the very old and pulling out food they had been chewing and had not had time to swallow. But it called for delicate timing. It was the same game they played with Adupa, and the fun was to play on the uncertainty the old person felt, not knowing whether the food would be snatched before he got it to his mouth or after. And sometimes, to really torment him, they would make as if to take the

food and then not take it, so the victim swallowed in haste and surprise and choked on it.

We can see from this example what effects starvation can have on a group of people and that this type of behaviour was not a “choice of living or dying” as Turnbull (1972:285) claims in his conclusion, but a biological reaction to an inhumane situation. (As brutal as his observation is, Turnbull was severely criticized for his publication and in his “method, in data, and in reasoning” (Barth, 1974:100). Barth’s article contains an excellent critique on how any study should not be conducted or written about.)

Other types of hunger exist, such as the privileged hunger (or privileged fasting) of those who fast for religious reasons, especially when food is abundant and is a reward for completing the fast. Examples of this would be not eating during daylight hours during the Muslim Ramadan or abstaining from meats and dairy products during Eastern Orthodox lent. Then there is the hunger of the bulimic or anorexic; those disorders that hyper-reflect the thin beauty standards and dieting obsessed culture of many “Western” societies. “That the principal sufferers of such illnesses should be young white Western middle-class females is a powerful cultural signal” (Mintz, 1996:5). These types of hunger, either as religious obligations not to eat or as the “popular cultural” perceptions that food, if consumed, is not good for the “body image,” are “powerful cultural signals” because in these cases they can occur amongst those who have access to food. As a “cultural signal,” food banks on the other hand signify a type of “political statement,” especially to governments, the food industry, or to those who care enough to see that there are many who want to eat, but cannot always get to the food they need or want in our land of plenty

First world hunger, such as in modern industrial economies like Canada, cannot be viewed as similar to the hunger of many non-Westernized countries such as India or

Brazil. Canadian hunger is different from that of the third world and the experience of “malnutrition...does not necessarily involve the painful sensations associated with consumption of too few calories” (Poppendieck, 1997:141). Canadians do not suffer *delirio de fome* or the “madness of hunger” as some of the poor do in northeastern Brazil (Scheper-Hughes, 1992:129). Deaths due to malnutrition-dehydration in that part of the world are described, according to Scheper-Hughes (1992:129), as:

doenca de cao, the “dog’s disease.” They are referring to the similarities with death from rabies, which people call *raiva*, rage, fury madness. The madness—the *delirio*—of hunger is indeed very much like rabies, and death from hunger is indeed a dog’s death.

The hunger experienced in the first world cannot compare to Scheper-Hughes’ example. Often the hunger in the first world is offset by “people who fill up on starchy foods with low nutrient density [and] may experience few or none of the discomforts of hunger, but nevertheless, their diets may be inadequate to maintain health” (Poppendieck, 1997:141-142). So the traditional “poor man’s food” in Canada, products such as Kraft macaroni and cheese dinners and potatoes, fill people’s stomachs, but do not provide them with a balanced diet. Hunger in Canada, for the most part, is the lack of sustainable, appropriate quantities and quality of food and the need to access emergency food programs, like soup kitchens and food banks.

The lack of food is most often attributed to poverty, which can in its simplest state be defined as “material deprivation or a lack of access to material resources” (Goode, 1980[1972]:376). In Canada several formal mechanisms are in place to alleviate poverty. They include: guaranteed minimum wages, welfare, subsidized housing, employment insurance, and disability benefits. Even with this “social net” in place poverty continues to exist. The fact that food banks exist in Canada, as an informal, supplementary method to alleviate poverty, is an indication that the formal methods are inadequate for many

people. They may be inadequate in terms of financial generosity to the budgets of these programs and to the individuals who receive monies from them, flawed as policies and not well planned out, or they are outright failures. Even the media has picked up on food banks and poverty related issues with headlines such as: “*Food Banks Mourn Success*” (Maxwell, 1997:A3), “*'New Poor' Turn to Food Banks*” (Kubara, 1998:4), “*Cities Poor are Among Poorest in Land*” (McArthur, 1998:A3), “*Food Bank Users Immune to Economic Good Times*” (Philp, 1998:A7), “*Tory Workfare Targets Poor*” (Russell, 1999:A14) and “*Food Banks Sprouting Up Across Rural Manitoba*” (MacKenzie, 2000:A11). These and other media reports point to food banks as a national issue and a topic that is consciously and consistently being presented to the general public.

The increase in the number of food banks over the last twenty years indicates that there is definitely a problem with the redistribution of food in Canada. The 698 food banks in Canada as calculated by the Canadian Association of Food Banks (September 1999) are evidence of this. That number only indicates the number of main-line food banks, for example Winnipeg Harvest, and does not include the part-time front-line food banks, for example the church in your neighbourhood that runs a food bank out of its basement. Granted, charity has existed for centuries, in one form or another, such as alms, bread lines, soup kitchens, and in the last twenty years food banks. However, food banks for the most part reflect the situation of the present time. Although soup kitchens and charity are still active today, food banks have become a late twentieth century, primarily urban, phenomenon that deals with surplus and discarded food and the need to get it to those who cannot afford it by accessing it through conventional methods.

FOOD AND FOOD SYSTEMS

The study of food and food systems has long been a concern for anthropologists. Research in these areas has spanned a full spectrum with anthropological inquiries delving into three primary areas: production, distribution, and consumption/diet. Within each of the three primary areas the anthropological focus has ranged from ecological, to physiological, to political/economic, to symbolic analyses.

Food and the system necessary to secure that food are necessities without which human populations cannot exist. A food system is a cultural mechanism that “meets basic human nutritional needs” (Bodley, 1996:83) through the processes of production, distribution, and consumption. It can be seen as one of the fundamental foundations to any society, past and present, which can determine the direction of its social structure and ideologies. Humans eat and dine rather than graze and feed like animals (Farb & Armelagos, 1980:1), meaning that the human acts of food production, distribution, and consumption go beyond human nutritional needs. From simple to complex societies food takes on important if not central roles. Examples are class distinctions (*haute cuisine* vs. fast food), gender divisions (women’s dieting vs. men’s gluttony), and symbolic ceremonies (Easter lamb or Christmas turkey). As an anthropological topic, the study of food can be used as a vehicle to discover and understand how societies and their cultures function. In other words, you are what you eat.

Throughout human history and up to the present time people have continuously sought ways to eat, as individuals or groups, through a variety of methods and practices. The range of human acquisition of food has varied over time and place, from hunting and gathering, to fishing, to pastoralism, to farming, or any number of combinations of these practices.

What determines a society's food system is most often dependent upon the ecology, or infrastructure. Factors such as habitat (ie. physical environment) and demographics (ie. population size/density), and technology play vital roles in influencing what type of food system would be adopted by a population living in a given habitat. Thus the Dobe !Kung San of the Kalahari Desert (see Lee, 1984) were best able to succeed as hunter-gatherers in southern Africa, using simple, but effective technologies to collect, store, and process food. Meanwhile Canadians, living in densely and heavily populated urban centres, are dependent upon an entire complex of large scale farms, bioagricultural companies, food processing technologies, wholesalers, retailers, and storage and transportation systems to bring food from its raw state from the producer to the mouths of the consumers. Added to this complex food system are the personal devices such as ovens, microwaves, toasters, and so forth so that individuals, families, restaurants, and so on, use to prepare their meals. The simple act of eating in a complex society is not so simple anymore, at least in terms of getting food to its consumable state.

By studying food and food systems we can develop an idea of the many facets of any society. Looking at how people eat, what they eat, where they get their food, and so on can tell us many of the intimate details of the people of a society without having to ask them directly. As the noted anthropologist Sidney Mintz claims, "food [and food systems] was [and can still be] an instrument for the study of other things" (1996:3). Farb and Armelagos (1980:2) support this claim by stating:

An anthropologist who knows what the members of a society eat already knows a lot about them. Learning how the food is obtained and who prepares it adds considerably to the anthropologist's store of information about the way that society functions. And once the anthropologist finds out where, when, and with whom the food is eaten, just about everything else can be inferred about the relations among the society's members.

Although food is a basic necessity of life, it is not only a means for nutritional survival for humans and human populations. Food can be seen as a type of social lubricant that, as Mintz (1996:4) declares:

cemented loyalties, reminded people who they were in relation to others, fortified them for their tasks, and linked them to their gods...It was not the food or its preparation that was of interest [especially to many early anthropologists], so much as what, socially speaking, the food and eating could be used for...Bronislaw Malinowski's beautiful studies of the Trobriand Islanders, which brought together yam cultivation, feasting, magic and chieftainship, were certainly much involved with food; but they were really concerned with what food did for the social order.

Thus food systems can be seen as “cultural mechanisms [that go beyond attempting to meet] basic human nutritional needs” (Bodley, 1996:83). In addition to the satisfaction of human nutritional needs, food systems and the food produced, distributed, and consumed are integrated within the culture of a society and are reflections of that political/economic order.

Hence, food goes beyond filling one’s stomach. According to Mintz (1996:7-8):

For us humans, then, eating is never a “purely biological” activity (whatever “purely biological” means). The foods eaten have histories associated with the pasts of those who eat them; the techniques employed to find, process, prepare, serve, and consume the foods are all culturally variable, with histories of their own. Nor is the food ever simply eaten; its consumption is always conditioned by meaning. These meanings are symbolic, and communicated symbolically; they also have histories. These are some of the ways we humans make so much more complicated this supposedly simple “animal” activity.

As Mintz points out, understanding food and food systems and their “meanings” requires placing them in a larger context. An understanding of the ecology (infrastructure), social structure, and ideology (superstructure) of any society, along with “histories,” can lay the foundation for a comprehension of the many facets of any society and its culture(s). Once a food system is placed in its ecological, social structural, and ideological context then a better understanding of its strengths and weaknesses can be achieved.

FIRST WORLD FOOD SYSTEMS & FOOD SECURITY

An adequate functioning food system must “1) avoid long-term depletion of the natural resource base; and 2) it must equitably distribute essential nutrients to people” (Bodley, 1996:83). In the past and present, all societies have devised methods to distribute food. These methods vary, with patterns of food distribution ranging from egalitarian reciprocity, such as among the Dobe !Kung San in the Kalahari Desert (Lee, 1984), to profit oriented supermarkets (ie. Safeway, IGA, Costco) in industrial/post-industrial capitalistic societies such as Canada and the United States.

At least according to Bodley’s criteria, some societies (ie. Dobe !Kung San) have been very successful in providing an adequate diet to their numbers while not over-exploiting their natural resource base. Their low population levels and migratory lifestyle are such that when an area is deemed “depleted” (in the sense that the most favoured foods were used up to the point where it was not efficient to go back there) they could explore other areas while the “exploited” area was left to lie “fallow.” The commercially driven food systems of rich industrial societies (ie. Canada) are “not only far more costly in per capita demand for energy and resources, they are ultimately less sustainable than small-scale, noncommercial systems and are much less responsive to basic human needs” (Bodley, 1996:113).

Analyzing the method of food distribution, which is one of many important aspects of any food system, reveals who has control and access to food in a society. Focusing not just on the cost of energy expended and resources wasted, but on the “response to basic human needs” that food systems provide can give an indication not only of the power systems and social stratification of a society, but also some evidence of its cultural goals and values. An inquiry into these goals and values can then give us a partial understanding to the problems of hunger in any given society.

One of the cultural values of the food distribution system in North America is that it is driven by profit and food becomes a commodity, to be traded and sold on the open market. Food sales figures of \$48.5 billion in Canada and \$359 billion (U.S.) in the United States in 1993 and statistics showing that close to 97% of Canadian households shopping at supermarkets on average twice a week (Kingston, 1994:52) suggest North Americans (consumers, producers, retailers, wholesalers, etc.) are all dependent on this food distribution system to access food.

The supermarket as a food distributor is a business where nothing is arbitrary (Kingston, 1994:55).

The fact that profit margins are the lowest of any industry demands that the supermarket business be cutthroat and competitive. Net margins after tax average between 0.5% and 2%, with the higher percentages going to independent operators who have lower sales and revenues. Such slim margins dictate that the supermarket operators concentrate on costs, more than product, to operate efficiently. A strike or increased wage demands from unionized workers can decimate profits. Supermarket owners also demand that every cost be carefully calculated (Kingston, 1994:55).

Because it is run as a business, the emphasis of the supermarket is on profit rather than on feeding people. So focused is the supermarket towards profits that nothing is left to chance: the layout of a store is well planned out, consumer behaviour is constantly being analyzed, and food companies bid for premium shelf space. Furthermore, it is a business that can at times be illogical where prices drop when demand rises in products called “loss leaders.” For example, Christmas turkeys, which can take a loss in profit, draw consumers into the store and the logic of these “loss leaders” is that the consumer will buy more goods, especially ones that have higher profit margins (ie. sodas, chips, etc.) (Kingston, 1994:56). However illogical or fundamentally flawed the North American food system is (in this case the distribution system), it does function well (in terms of efficiency, quantities and quality of food, etc.), especially for those who have the money

to participate in it. For those who lack money, they are left to find other means of acquiring food (ie. using food banks).

Unfortunately, this food system has set a potentially dangerous precedent because unlike other commodities, for example cars, toasters, and televisions, food is an essential or “intimate” commodity that we consume and take inside us to keep us alive (Winson, 1993:4). Once food becomes a commodity those seeking profit control its distribution and only those with money can have it. Food supply then becomes a type of social control because people without proper access to it may be forced to eat inferior foods (ie. stale or unwanted food) and to receive it in places they may find inappropriate (ie. food banks, soup kitchens). This limits people physically and socially by having what they eat and where they obtain their food determined primarily by market forces.

Because the supermarket was, according to Kingston (1994:52), “inevitable, the result of concentrated urbanization, the automobile, refrigeration, vacuum-packing, and other technological breakthroughs,” people in North America have become separated from the land as a means of livelihood. This process of urbanization, from 68% of Canadians living in rural areas in 1891 to 77% residing in urban areas in 1991 (Li, 1996:3), lead to the eventual loss of peoples’ ability to control the production and distribution of food. In 1987 five grocery distributors accounted for 70% of all food sales in Canada (Winson, 1993:165), which is evidence of the corporate concentration, and the profit oriented competitive values of this distribution system.

It is unfortunate that North American supermarkets are an “industry...not known for [its] innovation [not suiting the needs of all people, ie. the poor who cannot afford food]. In fact, major developments in North American Supermarkets over the last sixty years can be counted on one hand” (Kingston, 1994:54). Like some cultural patterns, the supermarkets have developed a “cultural inertia” not only due to ingrained habits and

complacency but “vested interests [that] are just as frequently responsible for maintaining a system in being” (Barrett, 1984:116).

The perpetuation of a food system that does not distribute food equitably to all people does not aid those who are poor. “Chronic hunger is rooted in the structural aspects of society, particularly inequalities of wealth and power, in cultures that make food a commercial commodity” (Bodley, 1996:83).

Because the primary objective of a commercial food system is to produce a financial return to investors, the system’s ability to satisfy human nutrition needs on a sustained basis is a secondary, virtually irrelevant consideration (Bodley, 1996:113).

Commercially oriented food systems then become “less responsive to basic human needs” (Bodley, 1996:113) especially to the needs of the poor people who find it difficult to purchase the necessary foods to maintain a healthy diet.

This results in the lack of food security: the ability to access food without social, cultural, and economic duress by individuals or groups on a consistent and sustainable basis. Riches (1997c:174) claims that all, not just the rich, should have “the right of access to affordable nutritious food and obtaining it in normal and socially acceptable ways.” Food security, or the lack of it, is a problem world wide, but “it is not a problem which occurs everywhere in the world at the same time and in the same way” (Bakker, 1990:24). In many poor countries, lack of food security can be due to the lack of production of food or the use of prime arable land for the production of commodities (ie. cash crops) for export sales rather than for the growth of food for subsistence. Cash crops can provide “needed capital, [but they] can also result in large productivity mixed with low per capita consumption...[which can lead to] famine in some sub-regions due to lack of distribution or problems of exchange” (Bakker, 1990:24). The other type of food security would have to deal with the specific matter of fairer distribution of food.

Some authors, such as Lappe and Collins (1982:7), go as far as stating that “right now the earth is producing more than enough to nourish every human being, both on a global level and even within the very countries we all associate with hunger and starvation.” In spite of this fact people starve, and even in such a rich country as Canada, poverty and hunger are a reality for many people. The problem of hunger is not only a “third world” problem but also a global one. The culturally appropriate method of obtaining food in the “first world” from profit oriented food enterprises is not always an option for many Canadians. This maldistribution of food has created a reaction amongst various groups, and to aid in alleviating hunger they have established food banks throughout Canada as an alternative supplementary, though not the most culturally favoured, method of food distribution.

PERSPECTIVES & METHODOLOGY

PERSPECTIVES

It takes more than participant-observation and interviews to produce a successful ethnography. Two perspectives that are dominant and necessary in the field of anthropology are: 1) the comparative perspective and 2) the historical and holistic perspective.

The comparative perspective is one of the fundamental elements in anthropology. Ethnographies can become powerful tools for comparative purposes for not only illuminating differences between societies and their culture(s) but also their similarities. According to Chodkiewicz (1995:1-2):

Anthropologists collect facts about all kinds of peoples, past and present. Because of the comparative techniques they use, anthropologists can make generalizations about humankind that have greater scope and validity than the generalizations made by other social scientists, who do not have the anthropologist’s experience of the diversity of human societies and cultures.

The comparative perspective can lead us to an understanding of the role of food banks as adaptations to poverty and hunger and their emergence, expansion, and appropriateness in Canadian society in relation to other similar situations within and outside of Canada. However, it often takes more than a comparative approach. Information has to come from other sources that may not necessarily seem to be relevant at the outset. Issues that may not, on the surface, be related to hunger and food banks, such as the use of drugs and the problems of violence, can nonetheless exemplify other problems associated with poverty (see Belmonte 1979, Bourgois 1996, Spradley 1970, Stack 1974).

A historical and holistic perspective must also be taken. According to Winson (1993:9) research:

must be historical, because the past inevitably sets the stage for the present and provides a key to understanding the original purpose of current arrangements. By indicating what could have been, the past can also prove to be a guide for what still may be. The inquiry must also be holistic, because the effort to get at the heart of any piece of our social reality will fail if it does not also strive to decipher how the part fits into the whole, and how both part and whole are mutually determined.

The historical and holistic perspective allows for the analysis of food banks not only from an economic or political perspective; but also from a whole range of viewpoints so that many types of perspectives and analyses can be combined to provide a better understanding of the problem being studied.

METHODOLOGY

Fieldwork is an enlightening process and the ethnographer does not come out of the field as the same person that went in. Because researchers try to consciously absorb as much information as possible and is often inundated with sights, sounds, and smells that are often foreign to them, their experience is sometimes more heightened than the average traveler who experiences culture shock for the first time. The odd thing is that a

type of “culture shock” occurred in me during my fieldwork within the very society I grew up in and in the city of Winnipeg where I resided for several years and conducted this study. I was ultimately forced to confront issues I never had to deal with before.

I have never had to use a food bank or a soup kitchen, although they are common throughout Canada. Becoming exposed to them for the first time was strange and unfamiliar. Seeing the people at the food bank, sometimes those people who many of us try and consciously avoid making eye contact with, on the streets to recognizing the same faces from the food banks in coffee shops or restaurants made me curious, sad, depressed, and frustrated. It was only natural when I first began my study to be taken aback when I saw a food bank client “out of context.” I had to remind myself that these people were not any different than anyone else and that a food bank client has a life outside a food bank.

Although the study of poverty and food banks can be a lonely and unhappy pursuit, over time I developed a better outlook. Getting to know the people in my study over time, the workers, volunteers, and clients, I developed an understanding of who they were and why they happened to be in their particular position of their life. It was also a time of laughter and good deep hearted conversations with these people that brought me closer to “their stories,” views, and opinions; whether the person was the full time director of a food bank or an unemployed single male just making ends meet. In the end this is what fieldwork represents as a personal experience: a collection of memories, fieldnotes, collected facts, interviews, surveys, and so on, all compiled (hopefully) into one completed document that represents the culmination of one fieldworker’s experience.

As a fieldworker I learned to try not to become immune or distant during the course of the study; it only leads to weak research and sterile representations. I must

admit that I had crossed that line and an incident while visiting an inner-city soup kitchen woke me up.

I'll never forget the day when I was having a casual conversation with a pastor at a soup kitchen. When the mandatory church service was over before the people were allowed to have their food, they walked passed us: the elderly, the young, children, a man on crutches. I could see this stream of people walking past us while we just kept on talking as if nothing was out of the ordinary. Had I missed something? Could I have become so immune as to carry on a conversation while watching some of the poorest people in the country walk by me? It was later on that day that I decided to try my best to not allow myself to lose focus of what I was trying to do. Allowing myself to forget about the hardships that many people face only leads to apathy, and apathy can be dangerous thing in any society, especially when it comes to taking care of people, regardless of their status.

My first exposure to food banks came by volunteering at the main-line food bank, Winnipeg Harvest, then later on volunteering at two front-line food banks. Both were church run. One was a Baptist church and the other a Mennonite church. This exposure gave me a first-hand understanding of how these organizations work. My time spent at the Baptist church was primarily as an observer; I conducted half of my surveys and a few interviews there. The bulk of my front-line volunteering, really getting to know people and becoming involved in various activities was at the Mennonite church where the other half of the surveys were conducted and the majority of interviews took place.

The use of participant-observation, a survey, and open-ended interviews allowed me to research these organizations and the people associated with them to gain a better understanding of how they function, their place in the North American food system, and people's attitudes and opinions concerning them. The academic work involved the

following tasks: a review of literature, participant-observation, a survey, and open-ended interviews.

Participant-Observation:

The participant-observation method allows one to see, qualitatively, how an organization such as Winnipeg Harvest and some of its front-line member agencies in Winnipeg function. By participating in the daily routines of these organizations, talking with and interviewing various people who use and or deal with food banks, I was able to see how food banks have become affiliated with various supermarkets, governments, corporations, religious groups, and individuals.

“Participant observation is more a state of mind, a framework for living in the field, than it is a specific program of action” (Crane & Angrosino, 1992:64). This method of research allows one to gain insights into the themes to be researched that other methods (ie. surveys, archival research) would not provide. Participant-observation gives researchers the freedom to adjust to their surroundings and hopefully react effectively when problems arise in the field. Methods such as survey research are not as flexible and often the data has to be collected in a set fashion, with questions asked in a specific order. Furthermore, survey research and statistical analysis may provide certain information and generalizations, but there is the risk of representing people as neat, sterile demographic statistics and categories through these methods. Through participant-observation, anthropologists can experience what the daily activities mean to the people they are studying, what deviations may occur from normal routines, and how people adjust to changing situations (Crane & Angrosino, 1992:64).

The anthropologist as participant-observer is not just a detached observer “of the lives and activities of the people under study, but [one who participates] in that round of

activities. By becoming active members of the community, anthropologists need no longer be somewhat formidable “scientific” strangers, but can become trusted friends” (Crane & Angrosino, 1992:64). As Bourgois (1996:13) states, participant-observation can help to establish “long-term relationships based on trust [and] can begin to ask provocative personal questions, and expect thoughtful, serious answers.” Furthermore, the participant-observer can experience the:

“harshness of the voice” that...would...hardly [be] noticeable in the friendly confines of the structured interview; but as a participant-observer, one sees and hears things that would probably not come to light using more traditional research techniques (Hedican, 1995:204).

Participant-observation, however, is not a perfect methodology. The fieldworker is not a blank slate, a *tabula rasa*, which just absorbs information and writes it down. Anthropologists enter a fieldwork situation that is often foreign to them. The fieldworker often has his or her own preconceived ideas of what is occurring in the field, through background research, second-hand information, and possibly some preliminary fieldwork. There is also the fieldworker’s own personal upbringing (ie. class, status, ethnicity, education, etc.) that has a profound influence on how he or she reacts in the field and how they interpret what is happening around them. The best that fieldworkers can do while doing research is to try and maintain a balance between the “two worlds” they are in. That means maintaining some “objectivity” by keeping in mind that the fieldworker is most often not a “native” of the research setting and to go “native” is to lose perspective of the original goals of “research in the field.” At the same time the fieldworker must not allow personal biases to influence the researcher to such an extent that it would bring harm or compromise the people they are dealing with or the research itself.

The way I began my research on food banks was through volunteering at Winnipeg Harvest. This allowed me to participate and observe the daily functioning of this main-line food bank. Gaining access to this organization put me into contact with the front-line food banks, which are not full-time operations (ie. they open on average only three times a month) and are generally a part of a larger organization that runs them, for example a church or a community centre. The best way to have some affiliation with the front-line food banks is to either volunteer at Winnipeg Harvest, which has its own recruitment procedures for volunteers, or to become directly involved with an organization that runs a front-line food bank. Since food banking is only a small part of many organizations that run front-line food banks, the best place, at least at the beginning of this study, was to base myself at Winnipeg Harvest, the main-line food bank in Winnipeg whose main purpose is food distribution to its front-line member agencies/food banks. By volunteering at Winnipeg Harvest and through the method of participant-observation I was able to keep in contact with various food banks in Winnipeg and the people involved with them while at the same time conducting my research for this study.

I volunteered in various capacities, primarily as a worker/labourer in the warehouse and as a member of their education committee. Although Winnipeg Harvest is the high profile food bank in Winnipeg, especially in the media, its main function is as a co-ordinating organization. It keeps track of the number of clients it has to provide food for, how much food goes in and out of the warehouse each day, organizes food drives, promotes poverty and food awareness, and collects most of the donated food, organizes it, then redistributes it to its member agencies. It is a place where the logistics of co-ordinating most of the other food banks in the city takes place. The ethos of this organization is that of a voluntary organization with its own social organization, yet on a

day to day level it functions very much like many other warehouses with people coming and going, relationships forming and dissolving, and the daily routines most people face.

The social organization of the front-line food banks is different because the food is distributed not to an organization, but to individuals. Winnipeg Harvest, with the aid of the front-line food banks, has to keep track of how much food has to be delivered to each organization, so that food can be divided up as fairly as possible for the clients. However, other than the fair and respectful distribution of food, the front-line food banks often have their own mandates and beliefs that may not necessarily be aligned with the goals or views of Winnipeg Harvest.

Thus, the second phase of participant-observation was to spend time at the front-line food banks. Having become involved with two front-line food banks, one as a participant-observer/volunteer at the Mennonite church and the other as an observer at a Baptist church, I was able to observe and participate in the running of a front-line food bank, specifically from a religious perspective. I took part in as many activities as possible: the unloading of the Winnipeg Harvest trucks, eating lunch with volunteers, attending prayer groups before the food bank doors opened, talking to food bank clients and volunteers, establishing friendships, and cleaning up at the end of the day.

There were limitations to participant-observation while in the field. The anthropologist may be able to immerse him or herself in the field, but attempting to try and experience every activity or gain information through informal methods may not necessarily be feasible or desirable. When it comes to the problems of hunger and poverty, trying to experience both through observing other people is difficult enough; trying to actually imitate the experiences of those being studied or even going so far as “going native” creates a situation where the researcher could possibly lose his or her objectivity and research focus.

To gain a better understanding of the experiences of the people who work at and/or use food banks, the conducting of a survey of food bank clients and the interviewing of people who were directly or indirectly involved with food banks was necessary.

Survey

A survey, as Crane and Angrosino (1992:136) state:

can be defined as a focused, organized means of data collection...it is a logical and necessary complement to participant observation and related techniques based on subjective immersion in a cultural setting.

There are various types of surveys; however the survey I conducted could be described as a descriptive survey to gather general information about food bank clients.

Surveys that are descriptive “seek to describe the distribution within a population of certain characteristics, attitudes, or experiences and make use of simpler forms of analysis” (Singleton et al., 1993:250). The survey was also, for the most part, a forced response (survey) where the “questions [were] designed to use response categories that [were] predetermined by the researcher [ie. age, sex]” (Crane & Angrosino, 1992:143).

Specifically, the survey I conducted was partly made up of questions from the Winnipeg Harvest survey (with their permission) with some modifications (See Appendix A for a copy of the survey administered). The survey was a cross-sectional design survey “in which data [of] a sample or “cross section” of respondents chosen to represent a particular target population [was] gathered at essentially one point in time” (Singleton et al., 1993:254). The target population in this survey were food bank clients, and the time span of the implementation of the survey was from November 1998 to March 1999.

The questions asked in the survey ranged from basic demographic questions, (ie. sex, age, marital status), questions about the use of social assistance, and questions about food bank usage (ie. how often they are used, how they are used, etc.).

The surveys were conducted at two local food banks in Winnipeg where I had volunteered, with about twenty-six surveys collected at each one. The problem with conducting surveys at only two food banks is that it limits the sample size of the survey to just two specific front-line food banks and can possibly skew and bias the results. This is because food bank clients in Winnipeg tend to frequent local neighbourhood food banks because of the neighbourhood/community approach to food banking in Winnipeg. Thus, clients using food banks in one neighbourhood food bank could potentially be substantially different from the clients of another neighbourhood food bank. Hence, the results from the surveys of the first food bank could conceivably be different from the results of the survey of the second food bank. A crude example could be that the clients of one food bank could be made up of primarily underemployed persons (ie. the working poor) living in a higher socio-economic region of the city who use food banks infrequently while the clients of another food bank could be made up of people living on social assistance in a part of town much poorer than the first region.

The two food banks where I conducted surveys at were located respectively in the Fort Rouge area and the West End area of Winnipeg. These are two very different socio-economic neighbourhoods of the city and the results from the two neighbourhoods may be substantially different due to various explanations, for example cheaper housing and better access to cheaper food markets.

I limited the number of surveys collected to fifty-two because of time and financial constraints and because I was the sole surveyor of the questionnaires. Each survey took on average ten to fifteen minutes to complete and because food banks are

open for about one to two hours with the average client spending only ten minutes in the food bank, I could average about two to three surveys per visit (not counting rejections or time spent observing the daily routine at the food bank). Also, the two food banks I visited were open only once a week, three to four times a month, so the number of surveys collected per week came out to about five or six.

I confined my surveys to these two food banks because of the rapport I developed with the organizers and volunteers. Some food banks were so fast paced that it was impossible to develop any kind of relationship with the people, while the ones I became involved with were set up in such a way as to provide an environment conducive to meet people. For example, coffee and donuts were offered at tables set up for the clients so they could sit, chat, and rest for a while before or after their food was collected.

The way I brought up the topic of the survey was to strike up a conversation with a person while having coffee with them. During the conversation, I mentioned my purpose for being at the food bank. From there I proceeded to ask them if they would like to fill out the survey. If they agreed I told them that the survey was completely confidential and that none of the information would have any bearing on their status as a food bank client and that it could not be used against them (ie. information falling in the hands of welfare case workers, etc.). Other times I would try and approach someone quickly if I noticed they were sitting by themselves not surrounded by people.

When I conducted the actual survey, I sat beside the person being surveyed and read the questions and responses to them. I did this because sitting beside a person allowed for a friendlier conversation rather than a “face to face” type of confrontation. If the person had a reading difficulty, such as dyslexia or illiteracy and did not want to admit to it, my reading of the questions protected them from any embarrassment. If I saw

that the person began reading ahead or reading the questions on their own, then I let them read the survey while I checked off their responses.

I approached people that I felt comfortable speaking to rather than trying to make the survey as random as possible (ie. asking one person per table, every third person in a line up, or one person every five minutes). Because food bank settings can be very small and intimate, faces become familiar and seeing a lone surveyor every week jumping at every third person like clock work, can create uneasy feelings and could have been potentially detrimental to the food bank clients and volunteers and to the direction of this study.

In the broader context of this study, the “selective” approach I took to asking people to fill out the survey allowed me to maintain a lower profile so as not to draw too much attention to the person being surveyed or myself and permitted me to maintain a congenial presence at the food bank. Because I had to continue volunteering during the process of collecting surveys, I could not let the collection process interfere with my participant-observation and the development of my ties and friendships with my consultants/friends and other acquaintances within the food banks.

Unfortunately, my “selective” method of surveying people left certain people out. For example, each week there was a group of elderly people who sat at one table and spoke consistently in a language other than English. The language and age barriers alone between this group of people and I made it hard to approach them and the fact they seemed like a very tight-knit group made it much more difficult to establish a rapport. In situations like these I made a judgement call and decided to move on and continue with my own method of approaching people.

The data collected was entered into Microsoft’s Excel spreadsheet program that allows for the tabulation of responses and is a way of organizing numerical data.

Interviews

Interviewing allows researchers to investigate topics or situations that they would rarely ever, or would want to, encounter. “Interviews, explain and put into a larger context what the ethnographer sees and experiences” (Fetterman, 1989:47). It is during the interviewing process that the anthropologist has the opportunity to pursue in further detail issues and problems that he or she may have encountered while in the process of participant-observation and the conducting of surveys.

There are generally two types of interviews used in fieldwork: formal and informal. The informal interview is the most common in anthropological fieldwork. This type of interview can be seen not just as an interview, but a normal, daily conversation the researcher may be having with any one of his or her consultants. As Fetterman (1989:48) states, informal interviews “seem to be casual conversations, but where structured interviews have an explicit agenda, informal interviews have a specific but implicit research agenda.” The informal interview is a technique that is consistent with participant-observation because of its casual nature. What may be perceived as a friendly “chit-chat” is often an opportunity for the researcher “to discover the categories of meaning in a culture” (Fetterman, 1989:48).

Eventually, further, or precise, detail was necessary. Through formal interviews, in this case open-ended or semi-structured interviews, I was able to ask questions that dealt specifically with: 1) the experiences and opinions of food bank clients, and; 2) the experiences and opinions of those people who are directly involved with food banks (ie. volunteers, employees at food banks) (See Appendix B for a copy of the interview questions). The comments and opinions of the interviewees gave voice to some of the problems associated with food banks. The interviews allowed people to articulate their

own views on poverty and hunger. The interviews can further complement the sterile statistics, media portrayals, and uninformed opinions of poverty and hunger in Canada.

I conducted fifteen interviews that lasted anywhere from five to thirty minutes. All interviews were tape recorded, with permission of the interviewee. All interviewees were informed of their right to refuse to answer any of the questions and to end the interview at any time.

I interviewed people at the various main-line and front-line agency food banks. Because the food banks in Winnipeg take a neighbourhood/community approach (ie. serving people in their neighbourhoods rather than all people congregating at one food bank), the interviews took place in quiet rooms (ie. seminar rooms or offices) away from other people so that both the interviewee and I could talk with relative privacy.

There is a difficulty with interviewing people at front-line food banks. Often people go in, receive their food and leave quickly. At other times people arrive very early (sometimes an hour or two) and wait till the food is distributed. Through my own experience of working at the food banks, I questioned the interviewees when it was deemed most appropriate to the volunteers/organizers and the food bank recipients themselves.

The interviews of the food bank clients that I conducted at the front-line food banks were of people with whom I had established a rapport with, made friends with, and who were/are volunteers at the food bank they visit. The questions ranged in topics from their lives on welfare, work or lack of it, money issues, personal problems, how they make ends meet, and about their roles as volunteers at the food bank.

Finally, I interviewed the directors/organizers and the volunteers of the various food banks. I sought their opinions on numerous issues about food banks: for example, the food received, finances, donations, associations with government and business, the

food bank clients, success and failures of food banks, their or their organization's motivations for running a food bank, views of why or whether food banks are needed, if there is anything they are attempting to do to shut down food banks without having people go hungry, and the role of religion in food banking.

At times my study may have come across as "commando research," that is research done, for example, under time and or financial constraint (van Willigen, 1993:120). The largest constraints were, other than the personal problems that many fieldworkers face, the limitations of time due to the relatively short hours of the food banks (limiting my volunteer time), my own personal time schedule (work and school), lack of funding, and the length of the survey (it should have been much shorter). However, the use of the multiple methods, or "triangulation...the use of dissimilar methods or measures, which do not share the same methodological weaknesses—that is, errors and biases" (Singleton et al., 1993:392) has hopefully balanced out the research I conducted. Participant-observation, surveys, and interviews all have their limitations, but combined in one research project can lead to a final report that is holistic rather than confined to a narrow view of one methodology, the strengths of one method compensating for the weaknesses of the other methods.

ETHICS

An ethics committee from the Department of Anthropology at the University of Manitoba approved this project in the Spring of 1998. All names have been changed except for people's titles, city and neighbourhood names, and the names of the two main-line food banks: Winnipeg Harvest and The Toronto Daily Bread Food Bank. Because an organization such as Winnipeg Harvest is the main-line food bank in the city of Winnipeg the descriptions in this study make it difficult to disguise this organization.

Although I have changed or omitted all people's names in this study, several people may be recognized because of the titles of their positions and/or their opinions. For example, the Co-Ordinator at Winnipeg Harvest may be recognized. However, I doubt that any harm will come to him/her or the organization he/she represents. The mandates of these organizations are quite clear and have been represented as fairly as possible in this study. Furthermore, people in positions of authority in this study (ie. Winnipeg Harvest's Co-ordinator) are often public figures and their opinions are well known, especially in the media. So well known in fact that their views have not changed throughout the course of my research and parallel their past opinions. Thus, I feel it is unnecessary to have to eliminate their opinions and views in this study.

SUMMARY

This introductory chapter has presented the topic of this thesis, *An Ethnography Of Food Banks In Winnipeg: Organizations As Adaptations To Poverty And Hunger*. This thesis is not just a description of food banks but an analysis and demonstration of how food banks, specifically in Winnipeg, Canada, have become adaptations to poverty and hunger. This chapter introduces the concepts of poverty, food, hunger, first world food systems, and food security. Furthermore, the methodology used in the thesis is laid out, explaining in detail how participant-observation, a survey, and interviews were used to collect the data for the thesis. The next chapter, Review Of Literature, looks at the anthropological and non-anthropological literature that deals with food banks, poverty, food, hunger, and various other issues that deal with the topic of food banks, either directly or indirectly.

CHAPTER 1

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The literature on food banks, up to the present time, is limited. However, there is a wealth of anthropological and non-anthropological literature concerning poverty. This literature may not necessarily be directly related to food banks (ie. soup kitchens, drug use, social/support networks). It is nonetheless relevant because it highlights the various perspectives on poverty (ie. The Culture of Poverty) and on its manifestations (ie. hunger, violence, homeless street behaviour) at different times and in different places. Hence, the use of a wide variety of anthropological and non-anthropological sources in this study of food banks is not only necessary because of the lack of studies of food banks, but it is in keeping with the “spirit” of anthropology’s holistic and comparative approach.

The study of poverty is essentially about its causes, how it is perpetuated, how it changes over time, and how people react, adapt, and try to “get out” of it. It can be argued that the poor, the disenfranchised, and marginals are some of the most over-analyzed people. However, the study of food banks is more than an analysis of poor people who cannot access supermarkets; food banks are a symbol of a change in the food distribution system, the welfare state, and the political-economy of Canada. Thus, it is necessary to study food banks, because they are a sign that poverty is changing in Canada (using a relative rather than an absolute definition of poverty) and that is encompassing more people (ie. the working poor). For example, The National Council of Welfare (1998:11) estimates that there were 3,624,00 poor people in Canada resulting in a national poverty rate of 15.3%. Over time the absolute numbers and poverty rate fluctuated, but reached a high (this study only includes data up to 1996) in 1996 of 5,190,000 poor people in Canada resulting in a national poverty rate of 17.6% (National Council of Welfare, 1998:11) (The

issue of poverty, its definitions, etc. in Canada are further discussed in Chapter 2). Hence, not only is it imperative to study and have an understanding of the poor (ie. food bank clients) but also to comprehend the social, political, and economic policies that have lead to the rise of food banks over the last twenty years.

One of the fundamental bases of the debate on poverty rests on the dichotomy of the “deserving” and “undeserving” poor; those who are poor because of certain life circumstances (ie. disability, disasters, etc.) or because of their personal choices (laziness, irresponsibility, etc.), respectively. It can be argued that this dichotomy has set the philosophical foundation, either explicitly or implicitly, for most poverty research and analysis. The literature on poverty must be scrutinized so as to not perpetuate mistakes and simplistic models of past and current research. Poverty has to be examined from a holistic perspective, viewing it as a product of a stratified society rather than something that is “marginal” or independent of society or created solely by the mind set or actions of certain groups or individuals.

Poverty and the “War on Poverty” did not become in vogue until the 1960s. “The Social Science Index did not include a subheading for “poverty” until the 1960s” (Goode, 1980 [1972]:375). The literature to come out of this era, according to Goode, (1980 [1972]:376), can be divided into two categories: 1) “grandiose abstract writings about poverty, concerned with poverty “culture,” the values and behavior of the poor” and 2) “small-scale empirical studies of “the poor” as an analytical unit.”

It was the work of Oscar Lewis and his “Culture of Poverty” (1966) concept that triggered not only a decade of research on poverty, but also the refutation of his work by a generation of scholars (see Valentine 1968, Ryan 1971). Lewis’ hypothesis in the “Culture of Poverty” attempts to explain the perpetuation of poverty by focusing on the traditions and values of

underprivileged groups" (Harris, 1988:408). Lewis (1966:21) does acknowledge that the "Culture of Poverty" is "both an adaptation and a reaction of the poor to their marginal position in a class-stratified, highly individuated, capitalistic society." The work nonetheless takes on a psychological slant that was prevalent in the 1950s and 1960s, resulting mainly from the psychoanalytic influences of the "Freudian culture and personality paradigm that dominated anthropology in the 1950s" (Bourgois, 1996:16).

Lewis (1966:21) contends that:

Once the culture of poverty has come into existence it tends to perpetuate itself. By the time slum children are six or seven they have usually absorbed the basic attitudes and values of their subculture. Thereafter they are psychologically unready to take full advantage of changing conditions or improving opportunities that may develop in their lifetime.

Poverty in this respect is seen as some type of "psychological neurosis" that affects a certain segment of the population, and only certain types of poor people (Lewis, 1966:21). The "Culture of Poverty" supposedly disables them from being able to change or take advantage of any opportunities, be they economic, social, educational, and so on. This approach to poverty takes the view that the individuals and groups who are being studied are destined to live their life in poverty. From this perspective, culture(s) (beliefs, values, and behaviours) are seen as the primary factors that govern and dictate the poor's position in society rather than the external political-economic forces and social-structural constraints.

A line of thinking similar to Lewis' argument is Foster's "Image of Limited Good" (1979 [1967]). As Foster claims:

By Image of Limited Good I mean that behavior in these and other broad areas is patterned in such fashion as to suggest that Tzintzuntzenos see their social, economic, and natural universes--their total environment--as one in which almost all desired things in life such as land, other forms of wealth, health, friendship, love, manliness, honor, respect, power, influence, security, and safety exist in absolute quantities insufficient to fill even minimal

needs of villagers. Not only do “good things” exist in strictly limited quantities, but in addition there is no way directly within the Tzintzuntzeno’s power to increase the available supplies (1979:123).

Foster (1979 [1967]:144) does acknowledge that “goods” can be acquired by individuals, and not at the expense of others, by acquiring goods or resources outside the “closed system.” Yet, the similar perspectives of Foster and Lewis view poor people as “stranded in their lot in life.” Nothing they do or anything that happens, and according to Foster at the expense of others, will improve their situation. The peasants and the peasant village, in this view, are seen as closed off. The focus is again on the beliefs, values, and the mind attitudes of the peasants. There is an implicit assumption that these peasants are poor in their own world and can only achieve prosperity by leaving it. This view takes a synchronic “snap shot” view that change does not occur within their world and that people, and their situation, do not change.

Conversely, it could be suggested that the beliefs, values, and behaviours of the poor are a reaction and a possible adaptation to their poverty and that, given the right circumstances most poor people would take the opportunity to “get out” of poverty. As Gans (1995:2) argues:

the causes of these behaviors, when they do occur, are in fact usually poverty-related effects; that sometimes poor people are driven by the effects of poverty to actions that violate their own morals and values. Poverty-related effects or pressures develop because poor people lack the funds, the economic security, and sometimes the social supports and emotional strength, to behave in mainstream ways.

From the perspectives of the “Culture of Poverty” or the “Image of Limited Good,” the poor could be labelled as “undeserving.” The poor are in their position in life because they have, among other things, according to Lewis (1966:23): “a strong present-time orientation with relatively little disposition to defer gratification and plan for the future, and a high tolerance for psychological pathology of all kinds.” Lewis’ work and personal views about poverty, regardless

of his intentions, lead the way to a model of poverty that to this day can be used against the poor (ie. poor bashing, workfare). They are focussed on the symptoms rather than the causes of poverty.

Poverty must not be observed from such rigid enculturation models. Enculturation is the process through which:

the culture [or sub-culture] of a society tends to be similar in many respects from one generation to the next. In part this continuity in life-ways is maintained by the process known as enculturation. Enculturation is a partially conscious and partially unconscious learning experience whereby the older generation invites, induces, and compels the younger generation to adopt traditional ways of thinking and behaving (Harris, 1988:123).

These researchers cannot understand poverty only by observing actions and repeated behaviours, especially from one generation to the next. The data must be contextualized in the social conditions which may make it necessary for groups or individuals to act in certain ways and even to repeat various behaviours (ie. second generation welfare recipients or woman-centred households/absentee fathers (Stack, 1970)). As Harris (1988:125) states:

every replicated pattern is not the result of the programming that one generation experiences at the hands of another. Many patterns are replicated because successive generations adjust to similar conditions in social life in similar ways.

Liebow (1967:223) eloquently supports this view by asserting that:

many similarities between the lower-class Negro [sic] father and son (or mother and daughter) do not result from “cultural transmission” but from the fact that the son goes out and independently experiences the same failures, in the same areas, and for much the same reasons as his father. What appears as a dynamic, self-sustaining cultural process is, in part at least, a relatively simple piece of social machinery which turns out, in rather mechanical fashion, independently produced look-alikes.

Enculturation may be able to account for the “continuity of culture; but it cannot account for the evolution of culture” (Harris, 1988:125). The enculturation model may explain partly why people

do what they do and why they keep doing it (ie. using food banks). But enculturation cannot account for the change in society, for example higher poverty rates in Canada due to a shrinking middle class and a shift in the economy that stresses part-time employment with lower wages and less benefits. People often react and adapt to change or continue on with similar patterns of behaviour depending on personal circumstances or what direction their society changes, if it changes at all. If similar conditions persist from one generation to the next then it is possible that similar patterns of behaviour will persist.

Regardless of any changes in the culture of a society, personal behaviours, actions, and values do play a role in determining what occurs in a person's life. All people make decisions and choices. Sometimes the choices are not good for us. A person making detrimental choices who has more money, status, or power than someone from a lower socio-economic position may not necessarily suffer as much from his or her actions as opposed to a poorer individual. Thus, individual behaviours, actions, and values can only contribute little to the debate on poverty. Subsequently, other factors must be investigated.

The works of Lewis and Foster, regardless of their intentions, shifted their focus of poverty research away from an etic analysis (ie. the causes of poverty) towards an emic analysis (ie. values) of poverty. Those against the model of the "Culture of Poverty" would most likely agree with Valentine's (1968:156) statement that: "as long as the "war on poverty" is focussed mainly on changing the supposed customs and values of the poor--rather than on altering the economic and political structure of the nation--it will have little effect on poverty." It is this type of perspective that attempts to take the focus off of the individual and distances itself from a "blame the victim" mentality.

“Blaming the victim” is a corollary to the “undeserving poor.” The “undeserving poor” are seen as the masters of their own demise. This “blame the victim” mentality is often supported by myths perpetuated by those who are not poor, and sometimes by the poor themselves. “Blaming the victim” is easier to do because actions of the “other” (ie. excessive spending, violence, drug abuse, homelessness) are much easier to view in society on a daily or weekly basis, especially with the wide proliferation of the media and their focus on sensational events. Blaming society, corporations, a shrinking middle-class, and globalization is much more difficult because, although these social forces are influences in everyone’s lives, they are often abstract concepts that do not affect people daily or immediately. The actions of an individual, for example a homeless alcoholic, are tangible and can be seen on many streets in urban North America whereas the processes that have lead to homelessness and alcoholism are not necessarily noticeable to the naked eye and often occur over long periods time.

It is essential to examine the problem of poverty, first, from the perspective of its causes (ie. social inequality) rather than from its symptoms. It is the “causes” that are, by definition, what contribute to the symptoms of poverty (ie. a rise in food banks over the last 20 years in Canada). In his book, *Blaming the Victim* (1971), William Ryan attempts to dispel many of the myths of poverty and endeavours to explain poverty from the perspective of inequality. It is the inequality and stratification of society (in this case the United States) that causes poverty and can manifest itself as: slum housing, inadequate education and health care for those who cannot afford them, and the behaviours of people that arise from these problems.

Although this book was written in the early 1970s many of the issues Ryan deals with (ie. slum housing, racism, inequality in education and in law) are still prevalent today. While the

current debate on poverty rests on the viewpoints of structure and agency (see introduction), Ryan (1971:17) identified similar themes in his analysis, specifically the “universalistic” and “exceptionalistic” viewpoints. The “exceptionalistic” viewpoint suggests that:

problems occur to specially-defined categories of persons in an unpredictable manner. The problems are unusual, even unique, they are exceptions to the rule, they occur as a result of individual defect, accident, or unfortunate circumstance and must be remedied by means that are particular and, as it were, tailored to the individual case (Ryan, 1971:17).

Ryan criticizes this “blame the victim” mentality/“exceptionalistic” viewpoint and chooses instead to consider social problems from a “universalistic” viewpoint:

that social problems are a function of the social arrangements of the community or the society and that, since these are social arrangements of the community or the society and that, since these social arrangements are quite imperfect and inequitable, such problems are both predictable and, more important, preventable through public action. They are not unique to the individual, and the fact that they encompass individual persons does not imply that those persons are themselves defective or abnormal (Ryan, 1971:18).

Hence, it is not necessarily the psychology or values that necessarily perpetuate the poor's poverty, but rather as Leeds argues:

certain kinds of labour markets which are structured by the condition of national technology, available capital resources, enterprise location, training institutions, relations to foreign and internal markets, balance-of-trade relations, and the nature of the profit system of capitalistic societies...These are not independent traits of some supposed culture, but characteristics or indices of certain kinds of total economic systems (Leeds, 1971:246).

To take a current analysis of poverty, but with an emphasis on the drug culture in New York City, Bourgois (1996:319) asserts that:

The economic base of the traditional working class has eroded throughout the country. Greater proportions of the population are being socially marginalized. The restructuring of the world economy by multinational corporations, finance capital, and digital electronic technology, as well as the exhaustion of social democratic models for public sector intervention on behalf of the poor, have escalated inequalities around class, ethnicity, and gender.

What one can observe in North American society is not a “Culture of Poverty” resulting from the psychological inadequacies of the poor, but rather a “Culture of Survival” based on the decisions and actions of groups and individuals to do what is necessary to survive during difficult times. Sometimes survival is using soup kitchens (see Glasser 1988) for food or selling and using drugs (see Bourgois 1996, Hauch 1984, 1995) for money and personal usage. The actions of “the poor,” those labelled “bizarre” or “irrational,” especially by middle-class standards and ideals, are, upon closer examination sometimes “rational” when all factors (ie. social, economic, psychological, etc.) are taken into consideration. With the “War on Poverty” in the 1960s and a reaction to the model of the “Culture of Poverty” came a whole new series of urban anthropological and sociological studies. These new ethnographies fell into the category of “small-scale empirical studies of ‘the poor’” (Goode, 1980 [1972]:376).

The urban ethnographies from the 1960s and 1970s during the age of the “Culture of Poverty” had been conducted in the anthropological tradition of studying small-scale societies. Even though the studies were done in large urban centres, they focussed on units of analysis such as: small groups of people, families, social-support networks, and so on. The works varied: Liebow (1967) studied of Black street corner men in Washington D.C., Spradley (1970) worked on homeless alcoholics on Seattle’s skid row, Stack (1974) investigated family and kinship and social-support networks in a Black ghetto community in the United States, and Belmonte (1979) analyzed life and family life in the slums of Naples. All are excellent ethnographies providing rich details of the daily lives of the people and their coping strategies. Although, these ethnographies do look at peoples’ behaviours, values, and culture(s), they take the position that, for the most part, larger societal forces (ie. unstable economies, prejudices and racism) influence

these peoples' lives.

Current anthropological literature on poverty and its many manifestations, such as Hauch (1984, 1995), Glasser (1988), Scheppe-Hughes (1992), Dettwyler (1994), and Bourgois (1996), all provide fine descriptions and analyses on their respective topics. While these works differ in their focus, all study aspects of poverty, be it homeless alcoholics in Winnipeg (Hauch 1984, 1995) or violent drug dealers in New York City (Bourgois 1996).

One of the best current anthropological works on poverty is Bourgois' (1996), *In Search of Respect: Selling Crack in El Barrio*. Bourgois' research focussed on poverty, crime, and drugs in New York City. This work deserves some attention, not only because of his use of participant observation, but also because of his political-economic analysis that attempts to balance the actions of individuals with the changing political-economy of the United States. The work, although not dealing with hunger, analyzes an extreme example of poverty that has lead to violence and a deterioration of a community. For comparative purposes, this work shows what can happen when inequality and poverty spiral out of control.

Bourgois describes New York city Puerto Rican drug dealers, who have the potential of earning hundreds of dollars daily, but at the same time are unable to penetrate mainstream "respectable" America. These "crack" dealers however, are not passive puppets who have not "accepted their structural victimization" but rather:

embroiling themselves in the underground economy and proudly embracing street culture, they are seeking an alternative to their social marginalization. In the process, on a daily level, they become the actual agents administering their own destruction and their community's suffering (Bourgois, 1996:143).

Following the lives of several people implicated in the underground drug economy, Bourgois

watches them, often times helplessly, destroy their lives through violence and drug use. At the same time Bourgois balances his “agency” approach to help explain these peoples’ position in life with the broader “structural” aspects of the:

restructuring of the U.S. economy around service jobs [that] has resulted in unemployment, income reduction, weaker unions, and dramatic erosions in worker’s benefits at the entry level...[Furthermore there are the] cultural dislocations of the service economy... [that] propels many inner-city youths into a wrenching cultural confrontation with the upper-middle-class white world (Bourgois, 1996:115).

The changing economy of a society is a major factor in determining what direction certain populations (ie. young males in inner-city slums) will lean towards in their lives. It may be to better paying jobs, if they are available, or to higher crime related activities if appropriate opportunities do not exist (ie. good access to education or job training).

The people in Bourgois’ study were part of a social network that was narrowly confined “to the weakest sector of manufacturing in a period of rapid job loss” (Bourgois, 1996:141). If this had not been the case then they might have been able to work long enough to “enable them to adapt to the restructuring of the local economy” (Bourgois, 1996:141).

What occurred was a closing down of local factories that sought cheaper labour elsewhere. The Puerto Rican immigrant’s working-class jobs, with steady employment, dissolved. This lead to the “treadmill of rotating from one poorly paid job to the next” (Bourgois, 1996:137). With little education and social skills more adept to street culture, the people in Bourgois’ study who pursued any mainstream jobs in the growing FIRE sector (finance, insurance, real estate) in the United States were met with hostility by employers and supervisors who expected middle-class work ethics and skills. The presence of strong unions or fellow workers that provided a “culturally based sense of class solidarity” had all but disappeared in

neighbourhoods like East Harlem, leaving the street youth with a choice between “dead end” jobs in mail or photocopy rooms (Bourgois, 1996:142) or more profitable but dangerous street activities such as drug dealing.

A common theme that runs through the urban ethnographies, particularly from the 1960s and 1970s, is that of social-support networks. To survive in impoverished conditions means having to rely on others, be they kinship networks (Stack 1974), street corner relations (Liebow 1967), or the people of a “defended neighborhood” in the slums of Naples (1979:41). Even at the level of homeless alcoholics we see social-support networks that are necessary to survive on the streets (Hauch 1984, 1995).

Hauch’s (1984, 1995) study of homeless street people in Winnipeg is a good example of social support in the form of egalitarian reciprocity amongst these people. To live on Skid Row means having to rely on others for help, especially when one is unemployed, desperate for money, and living in a climate with exceptionally cold winters. A valuable aspect of Hauch’s study was that it dispelled certain myths of homelessness and that it explained apparently “irrational” behaviours of the homeless as “rational” and necessary to survive on the streets. The behaviours of the homeless on Winnipeg’s Skid Row often times mirrored the egalitarian reciprocity of hunter-gatherer bands. The “nondeferred gratification,” money spending practices (Hauch, 1995:295), and drunken binges (Hauch, 1995:300) of the homeless are adaptations to living on the streets.

In egalitarian societies, goods flow freely with no one person admitting to keeping a precise count of the flow of goods. There is an implicit assumption that when one person gives to another the giver knows that inevitably the time will come when he or she will be in need and

that eventually they can count on someone for help, and not necessarily from the recipient of today's gift, who may have some extra goods or money.

The money made from casual work (sometimes from exploitative casual labour offices, see Stymeist 1979) is spent quickly on other street people. Spending on those who do not have money will eventually be reciprocated when the person who previously had money is "down on his luck." Yet, gifts of goods or money may not necessarily come from the last person the receiver gave to. Goods or money come from those who have. There is not necessarily a "you owe me" situation.

Similar actions were observed by Stack (1974), but in situations where familiarity with givers and receivers was higher because of ritual kinship relations. As Stack (1974:34) states:

A gift received is not owned and sometimes can be reclaimed by the initiator of the swap. A person who gives something which the receiver needs or desires, gives under a voluntary guise. But the offering is essentially obligatory, and in the Flats, the obligation to repay carries kin and community sanctions.

The obligation to give or "payback" in this situation is much higher because the proximity of a family relationship is much closer than amongst the homeless. The homeless are a fluid population. "Over time [the homeless] may exhibit considerable variation in size and density, and comprise specific individuals for only the shortest periods" (Hauch, 1984:12). The chances of running into the same people over time on the streets are much less than in a family situation. The driving force of [these] arrangement[s] is not pure altruism. Everyone [on the streets and in Stack's case with families] is expected to both produce and distribute--at least intermittently--to maintain balance over the long term" (Hauch, 1995:300). To prevent people on the street from hoarding money or goods over long periods of time social control mechanisms are in place to

keep the flow of goods distributed relatively even. There is direct punishment on misers who consistently hoard goods such as robbing and/or beating them.

There are also more diffuse punishments such as ostracism or gossip directed at a person's sanity, calling the miser crazy and dangerous. This type of behaviour can only lead to isolation, and on the streets that means having no one to turn to and further difficulties of surviving without some type of (state) intervention (Hauch, 1995:299). Similarly, according to Stack (1974:34), "individuals who fail to reciprocate in swapping relationships are judged harshly."

Although not directly, Hauch's work can be viewed along similar lines to Bourgois' research. Not because the homeless in Winnipeg are able to make money off of lucrative drug transactions, but because they are, for the most part, affected by and unable to stay off the streets due to underemployment or unemployment or welfare aid that is "generally [restrictive] on the basis of mere Skid Row citizenship" (Hauch, 1984:84). Both Hauch and Bourgois suggest that the only way off the streets is through steady employment. The desire to work legally by the people in both studies is evident. Yet, the exploitative nature of the casual labour offices, low wages, and piece-meal work (Hauch 1984, 1995, see also Stymeist 1979), or the difficulty of the under-educated Puerto Rican drug dealers to adjust to "white" American middle-class jobs, create a revolving door effect. Employment is tenuous and often the people end up back on the streets, because jobs end as quickly as they start, or they give up jobs out of frustration and the inability to adjust to the work, or because some work does not pay as much as a street drug dealer would get.

Ironically, the image of the "rich" street drug dealer is often a façade. They never really

end up making that much money because “their take-home pay is a function of how much they sell. When converted into an hourly wage, this is often a relatively paltry sum” (Bourgois, 1996:92). These “dealers” tend to overspend their profits, just as many other people in their own society where the “tendency to overspend income windfalls conspicuously is universal in an economy [U.S.A] that fetishizes material goods and services” (Bourgois, 1996:91). Furthermore, the money earned is not “legitimate,” at least with Revenue authorities (ie. IRS or Revenue Canada). Any type of banking done over the long term can become suspect to these and other authorities thus keeping the money and sometimes the people who earned it in the “underground” economy. This makes it possibly more difficult to save money and enter the “main-stream” economy. Employment alone however does not decrease the effects of poverty if the wages remain low. Yet, tenuous employment is a major factor in contributing to the (anti-social) behaviours that are adaptations to living or “dealing” on the street and good steady employment is something that has to be addressed when attempting to deal with poverty in North America.

Some ethnographies dealing with poverty that confront the problems of hunger are the works of Glasser (1988), Schepers-Hughes (1992), and Dettwyler (1994). Dettwyler and Schepers-Hughes focussed their research on hunger and malnutrition in Mali and Brazil, respectively. These works, and others like them (ie. Turnbull 1972) are necessary because they provide a view of hunger that is rarely if ever seen in North America. Dettwyler’s *Dancing Skeletons: Life and Death in West Africa* (1994) is a personal account of her fieldwork in Mali. Although Dettwyler’s approach to her ethnography is autobiographical, she nonetheless provides a great deal of information on malnutrition in this West African country. Dettwyler’s experiences in Mali are best summarized in a conversation she had with some health care workers in the field.

Regardless of preventative medical intervention to improve the health of the population, malnutrition was the ultimate killer. As Dettwyler states:

“OK. Look at it this way,” I explained. “Kids used to die here of neonatal tetanus, right? When they were only a few weeks old. Some of them survived the neonatal period only to die of measles or diarrhea when they were one or two years old. Many children died of diarrhea from drinking contaminated water and because no one knew about oral rehydration solution. Now the kids don’t die of tetanus or measles, because of the immunization program. They don’t die of diarrhea because of the wells and the ORS program. Instead, they die of lingering malnutrition when they’re three or four, or five or six years old. Is this really an improvement?” (1994:145)

Even with the best intentions, programs aimed at aiding the sick are rendered useless because of the issue of food security. Hence, the short-term solutions (ie. food banks) only provide “band-aid” results for problems that have to be addressed from a structural/systemic perspective. The short malnourished children, according to Dettwyler (1994:104), do not survive or grow up to become tall adults like the adults in the village where Dettwyler did her study, they die. Food is often reserved for adults and the elderly and the malnourished look of children, “the dancing skeletons” as Dettwyler referred to them during a village ceremony, is typical and the standard look of the rural children (Dettwyler, 1994:104).

In *Death Without Weeping: The Violence of Everyday Life in Brazil* (1992), Scheper-Hughes’ extensive ethnography of North-Eastern Brazil, one reads about the “hunger of those who eat every day but of insufficient quantity, or of an inferior quality, or an impoverished variety, which leaves them dissatisfied and hungry” (1992:137). The poor and hungry of North-Eastern Brazil can suffer “*delirio de fome*, the madness of hunger” and deaths from malnutrition-dehydration (1992:129-166). Furthermore, there is “*nervos*” a “large and expansive folk diagnostic category of distress...that is a common complaint among the poor and marginalized

people in many parts of the world" (Schepers-Hughes, 1992:172-173). As Schepers-Hughes (1992:173) explains:

nervos has become the primary idiom through which both hunger and hunger anxiety (as well as many other ills and afflictions) are expressed. People are more likely today to describe their misery in terms of *nervos* than in terms of hunger. They will say, "I couldn't sleep all night, and I woke up crying and shaking with *nervos*" before they will say, "I went to bed hungry, and woke up shaking, nervous, and angry," although the latter is often implied in the former.

The works of Dettwyler and Schepers-Hughes are Third World perspectives on hunger. A frame of reference is established demonstrating that the causes of poverty and hunger may be the same cross-culturally (ie. stratification and inequality), but that the manifestations are quite different. The triggers of poverty and hunger in North America may be cut backs to social programs (ie. welfare, job creation), but there is still the ability of individuals to access soup kitchens and food banks to secure food that is more nutritious and plentiful than the average poor person would receive in Brazil or Mali. First World hunger does not usually cause physiological reactions as drastic as "*nervos*," but is reflected in the frustrations with access to social and employment resources that are often taken for granted in North America.

More than Bread: Ethnography of a Soup Kitchen, is Glasser's (1988) study of a New England soup kitchen which provides a look at hunger and food security from a First World perspective. Her descriptions and analysis of soup kitchens are closer to the situations and conditions of food banks in North America than the studies of Dettwyler and Schepers-Hughes. Glasser (1988:2-3) sees the contemporary soup kitchen as:

a particular adaptation to contemporary North American life, serving as an ecological niche for a segment of the poor who are considered "marginal" to the dominant culture. This marginality takes the forms of little income, long-term unemployment, debilitating physical conditions, serious mental illness, and a separation from family relationships.

Glasser emphasizes the role of the religious organizations that run soup kitchens and their concept of “ministry” and how the soup kitchen is a focal point for social/support networks. “The soup kitchen functions as a symbolic living room...[because] the soup kitchen guests lack the sources of human contact that most of us take for granted in work, family relationships, and consumer activities” (Glasser, 1988:3). The soup kitchen ends up being a “temporary surrogate family and community for a segment of the poor” (Glasser, 1988:6). While the hunger in North America is marginalized to Skid Row, and is expanding further with the rise in the number of food banks, the hunger in Brazil or Mali tends to be a an experience shared by an entire village. This is one of the differences of First World hunger compared to Third World hunger, how removed it can be from the dominant society.

The studies that have been analyzed up to this point have their limitations. One of the reasons for this is that they relied heavily on participant-observation. This approach normally conducted over one to several years time:

captures only immediate processes, [and] it tends also to contribute to the reification of the instant in terms of identities and categories that occupy the space and time of the fieldwork. Poor people appear poor rather than unemployed or underemployed. Homeless people appear homeless rather than displaced (Susser, 1996:416).

Because the ethnography is a present oriented study, often the processes (ie. political-economic conditions, gender divisions) that have lead up to what the anthropologist is observing (ie. soup kitchen clients) can easily be down played or forgotten. Crucial variables are seen as distant from the people being studied and the focus on immediate behaviours can unfortunately “reify” and possibly stigmatize people’s patterns of behaviour. These works can unintentionally lead to “blaming the victim.”

At times it is difficult for the anthropologist to contextualize his or her study in terms of structural constraints. Even in a study that tried to account for both individual actions and greater societal forces, Bourgois found it difficult to watch a “pregnant friend frantically smoking crack” and at the same time “remember the history of her people’s colonial oppression and humiliation, or to contextualize her position in New York’s changing economy” (1996:17). This is not to say that the ethnography is not a useful source of information. The accumulated knowledge through ethnographies over time only highlights that poverty has not gone away.

It is necessary to complement the knowledge gained from ethnographies, especially ones dealing with poverty and hunger, with other works that deal with such topics as welfare policies and social change (Harris 1981, Li 1996, Ritzer 1996). Because the literature on food banks is still in its infancy, most work has been done by people in fields outside anthropology, specifically in social work (see Riches 1986, 1997, Poppendieck 1998, Webber 1992).

This is an ideal time to pursue a study of food banks from an anthropological perspective, using the techniques used by anthropologists (see methodology section). At the same time sources outside of anthropology can be drawn upon to strengthen this study. These sources can make it more than a mere descriptive ethnography. They can contextualize this study in literature that accounts for the political-economic forces that have given rise to food banks and various theories to explain the social forces that have lead North American Society towards commodifying food rather than producing it for sustenance (see Bodley 1996, Kneen 1993, Winson 1993).

The first comprehensive study of food banks in Canada was presented by Riches (1986). His first book on the topic, *Food Banks and the Welfare Crisis* (1986), defines food banks and

describes how they came about, how they function, and analyzes their contribution to the Canadian welfare state. He argues that the need for food banks results primarily from the fiscal and social policies set by the various levels of government in Canada. As Riches (1986:71) states:

many provincial governments looked the other way as social assistance caseloads rose dramatically between 1981 and 1984—the period which saw the mushrooming of food banks..that benefits had been inadequate for many years; that cutbacks further reduced benefits for certain groups of people; that increasingly stringent eligibility criteria further eroded people's rights to receive adequate benefits; and that attempts at progressive reforms were held back in the seventies and eighties. In fact all levels of government have in different ways supported the rise of food banks and used them as substitutes for public welfare.

Underlying Riches' (1986) argument is the debate between the institutional/comprehensive perspective to social welfare and the residual perspective, with Riches' bias to the former. The institutional perspective "views social welfare as a necessary social institution that essentially meets the needs of people in industrial societies" (Delaney, 1995:16). The residual perspective "essentially sees social welfare as a limited and temporary societal response to human problems that stem from the needs of families or the marketplace that result when normal functioning fails" (Delaney, 1995:16).

Riches' work is a critique of the ““casualty treatment approach” to social welfare” (1986:7) and of the limitations to the comprehensiveness of the social safety net in Canada. It is limited to those who in Canadian society are deemed “deserving,” or who qualify for benefits such as welfare or employment insurance. Those who do not qualify for benefits or are assessed as deserving limited funding often find themselves struggling financially.

The topic of food banks then gives rise to an ideological debate of human rights and the

right to better or broader encompassing comprehensive social services. The issue of rights, particularly the right to food, and social welfare is discussed in Riches' later book, *First World Hunger: Food Security and Welfare Politics* (1997). This collection of essays written by various authors (Craig & Dowler, Poppendieck, Riches, Uttley, and Wilson) tackles the problem of first world hunger in countries such as Canada, the USA, the UK, Australia, and New Zealand.

These essays try to explain:

through comparative policy analysis, and the use of national case studies, why hunger, absolute poverty and food insecurity have again become prevalent in particular first world countries with established welfare states and social safety nets (Riches, 1997a:2).

It is no coincidence that the five countries in Riches' collection of essays are used as case studies. In these advanced industrialized countries hunger has similar causes, manifestations, and is dealt with in similar ways. These countries share a "common heritage...democratic traditions, styles of representative government, systems of law, religious ideas and institutions, capitalist economies, and systems of social welfare" (Riches, 1997a:6).

It is not however, necessarily the "common heritage" that has lead to the increase of "first world hunger." What Riches et al. (1997) argue is that first world poverty and hunger, particularly in these five countries, are due to the:

ideological preferences of the governments in power (of both the Right and the Left) in each of these countries from the early 1980s [that] have followed the New Right economic agenda which champions individual acquisitiveness at the expense of the poor and collective well-being (Riches, 1997a:12).

The United States lead the way in the early 1980s with the rise of "Reaganomics" (or as former President of the United States George Bush called it *voodoo economics*) and the Reagan administration cutting back on social spending with policies favouring higher income earners in

America. This had profound implications in other countries that followed their lead. As Poppendieck (1997) argues in her essay, the rise in hunger in America was due to the policies instigated by the Reagan administration.

Calling for reduced social spending, tax cuts and a reduction of welfare dependency, Reagan sought and obtained from Congress deep cuts in a whole host of federal social programmes. The combination of long-term changes in the economy, a sharp recession and cutbacks in federal assistance to poor people led the mayors of several large cities to declare a ‘hunger emergency,’ pointing to long lines at soup kitchens and food pantries as evidence (Poppendiek, 1997:137).

Similar events were occurring in New Zealand. New Zealand, in the 1970s and early 1980s, was characterized by governmental policies that “sought to control prices and wages, to maintain a closed and highly protected domestic economy and a highly subsidized export sector and who retained a commitment to full employment” (Uttley, 1997:85). That all changed with the opening up of the economy by lowered or removed tariffs, import quotas, and subsidies (Uttley, 1997:86). “Government and government activities were scrutinized with a view to reducing the size of the state and returning trading activities wherever possible to the private sector” (Uttley, 1997:86). The change in fiscal policies in New Zealand, as in the other countries discussed in Riches et al. (1997), during the 1980s and 1990s, saw a rise in poverty, hunger, and the number of food banks. It can be argued that there is a causal link between the neo-liberal policies of a government and a growth of inequality and poverty in these countries.

An example from New Zealand is a statement from the Minister of Social Welfare in 1991 who described the welfare state as being:

an institution which had been a product of affluence and minimal levels of social need and that it was not sustainable in its present form in the face of economic problems and increasing levels of social need (Uttley, 1997:94).

Uttley (1997:94-95) argues that the Minister was:

asserting that the level of social need in the community and the level of government income are always inversely related, so that a generous public welfare response to social need fashioned in a time of prosperity cannot be maintained in terms of either coverage or level of provision during periods of economic adversity. The welfare state accordingly requires reform so that there is a safety net, but one below that achievable in paid work thereby motivating people to move away from long-term dependence on the state...A return in other words, to systems more akin to the less eligibility ethos which applied before the contemporary welfare state came into being.

This comes back to the debate of residual and comprehensive social welfare and the ideologies that are behind any fiscal and social policies of a government that influence social welfare. Furthermore, the minister's comments address the issue of those who are "deserving" and "undeserving" and a fear by some that the state will support certain citizens who become "dependent" on state aid rather than being independent and working.

Riches et al. (1997) argue that their respective governments cannot ignore the fact that the policies and neo-conservative approaches to the economy and social welfare have affected the poor negatively. One way the poor have been affected is in their diet and the inability to access dominant food distribution centres consistently, thus having to rely on food banks.

Riches (1986) and Riches et al. (1997) provide a "macro" approach to poverty, hunger, and the problem of food banks. Case studies of food banks are few. An early work on food banks by Foley (1992), *Beggars Can't Be Choosers: An Ethnography of a Food Bank*, takes an ethnographic approach. Foley's (1992) work was limited to the description of one front-line food bank and it acted as a:

starting point to address [the] gap in the [food bank] literature by presenting an in-depth description of a food bank [in Toronto, Canada] and examining how one group of recipients, single mothers experience using it...[furthermore] women's perceptions of the quality and quantity of the food [were] analyzed in order to examine how the food supplied affect[ed] their sense of identity as mothers and cause[d] them to experience a loss of self-worth (from abstract).

Foley's work is invaluable because it gives a relatively recent description of how one front-line food bank operates, where the food comes from, whom it goes to, and the women's experiences

of receiving food from a food bank. From the interviews conducted in Foley's research we come to an understanding of the difficulties confronted by the clients in procuring food. We discover the challenges to women who are "often unable to provide food for their families. This causes them to feel like failures as mothers, experience a loss of self-respect, and develop a self-deprecating sense of identity" (Foley, 1992:103). Identity and self-worth are important issues when dealing with poverty especially at the grassroots, front-line food bank, level, because the experience of using a food bank can be difficult, embarrassing, and potentially stigmatizing.

The work of Martens (1994), "*Harvest Ministry*": *The Development of an Inner City Mission Ministry to the Destitute*, takes a pro-active approach to the problem of hunger in the inner-city of Winnipeg, specifically from an evangelical/theological perspective. From this position, an attempt is made to deal not only with the physical aspects of poverty and hunger, but the spiritual aspects, which are related to perceptions of identity and self-worth. Martens, who is the senior pastor of the Gospel Mennonite Church and "mission minded" members of his congregation, "developed a ministry to the destitute called the 'Harvest Ministry'" (Martens, 1994:2). Martens documents the development of the food bank, but takes also an active role in with the food bank. This is akin to "action anthropology" whereby anthropologists "attempt both to understand communities and to influence the rate and direction of change within these communities" (van Willigen, 1993:57).

Martens' work is an account of the development outreach program that "includes meeting the spiritual, emotional and physical needs of the destitute as they apply to specific situations within our community" (Martens, 1994:2). Martens' (1994:13-14) argues that:

the church was basically into "itself," so to speak. Its emphasis on edification had far outweighed evangelism. In its neglect to reach out evangelistically, the church had in fact

isolated itself from the community. Secondly, a mission and purpose statement would encourage the church to be “a part of” and not “apart from” the community. This would mean the church would actively participate in the life of the community and express an interest in the lives of those living there. It would no longer be seen as an island unto itself. Thirdly, a mission and purpose statement would help the church redefine its reason for being.

The people who are ministered to are “the bottom of the ghetto” and there is a “biblical basis and support” (Martens, 1994:22) for this. Thus, the position taken is a theology of the poor (Martens, 1994:27), based on biblical scriptures of the Old and New Testaments.

Martens’ analysis is not purely theological and he takes into account the social-economic causes of poverty. However, like in any religious organization the Mennonite Church has a “spiritual agenda” which takes the utmost precedence. There are difficulties with the “spiritual agenda” of church run charities because of the negative connotations that come with the aggressive proselytizing that is associated with some churches and other religious organizations (ie. “food for your soul”). This is an issue to be addressed because organized religion does play a significant role in food banks and soup kitchens. The idea of “food for your soul” puts churches into difficult positions. The values and beliefs of the churches may not necessarily reflect those of its food bank clients. Churches may be viewed as imposing their own values on food bank clients and potentially compromising or not taking into account their beliefs and values.

Another study on food banks conducted by Sloan and Stewart (1997), *Shelter Affordability and Housing Needs: A Study of Winnipeg Food Bank Users*, provides an in-depth statistical picture of food bank clients. This work, by comparison with Foley or Martens, lacks theoretical depth and thick ethnographic description. Nonetheless, Sloan and Stewart (1997:viii) developed a “profile of the typical food bank user with respect to shelter needs and other

sociodemographic variables" that is necessary to understand who make up the population of food bank clients. Sloan's and Stewart's (1997:vi) survey accumulated much data and found that:

over 75 percent of the respondents in [the] study were receiving social assistance. The majority of the food bank users were young, employable males on welfare living in rented accommodations that consumed well over 50 percent of their monthly income.

This type of data is valuable because it can give us an idea of what segment of the population is most likely to have to use food banks. Furthermore, it supports many of the arguments made by Riches (1986) and Riches et al. (1997) that the welfare system in Canada is inadequate to provide welfare recipients with enough money to cover their living expenses. Sloan and Stewart (1997:vi) argue that food bank users are shelter poor and that shelter costs, once "subtracted from the food bank user's monthly income...[left very little] to obtain the basic requirements for existence."

The work of Sloan and Stewart stresses that food, the most important necessity of life, has to be done without to meet such other needs as paying rent. As Uttley (1997:84) states:

food is in some ways seen as a discretionary area of expenditure in the sense that faced with demands related to housing, health, education, energy costs or meeting debts incurred by borrowing, altering food consumption [and accumulation] is one of the few ways in which expenditure can be modified to meet an immediate budgetary problem.

Because food bank clients are primarily welfare recipients, their income tends to be fixed and limited making it difficult for them to acquire food from supermarkets. Thus food banks have grown over the last twenty years as a stop-gap measure to aid a growing number of people who, for whatever reason, are unable to supply themselves with their own food.

Finally, there is a wealth of literature that deals with poverty and food banking that falls into a "grey literature" category. This literature ranges from pamphlets, brochures, and

independent studies conducted by various food banks in Canada and the Canadian Association of Food Banks. Furthermore there are poverty activist groups and media reports continually reporting on food banking in Canada. The range of topics dealt with spans from nutrition, to immigrants using food banks, to workfare, to housing issues, and so on. The issue of food banking in Canada is so intertwined with so many other factors (ie. housing, employment, benefits) it is not a topic that can be studied independently without running into other "issues."

The most recent piece of "grey literature" to deal specifically with food banking that is relevant to this study is the *HungerCount 1999: A Growing Hunger For Change* (September 1999). This is a study conducted by the Canadian Association of Food Banks and is basically a survey of the number of food banks in Canada (698, not including front-line food banks), broken down by province, the average amount of people using a food bank per month (790,344 in March of 1999 compared to 378,000 in March of 1989), and other basic socio-economic demographic statistics. It is not necessary for the purposes of the literature review to go into every statistic. But the fact that there are groups that are compiling information and statistics on issues such as food banking suggests that this is an issue that is of great importance in Canada. Also this type of information is invaluable and will be used in this thesis.

SUMMARY

This review of literature has attempted to show how poverty has been viewed, primarily from the 1960s to the present. Much analysis, especially the urban ethnographies of the 1960s and 1970s, has focussed on the behaviours and experiences of the poor. The more contemporary ethnographies dealt with in this review of literature deal with poverty and hunger from a third-

world perspective. Literature that is specific to food banks has been written by a handful of academics, primarily from a social work perspective and from the “grey literature” published by anti-poverty advocates and by those working in food banks themselves. This study, following the traditions of the ethnographic method, will attempt to do the same by analyzing the experiences and behaviour patterns of food bank clients and how food banks are organized as adaptations to poverty and hunger. However, the ethnographic data (participant observation, survey, interviews) will be contextualized in an analysis, in the following chapter, of the inequalities of the political-economy of Canada and the inherent deficiencies of its for-profit food system (see conclusion) so as to achieve a better understanding of how food banks fit in Canadian society and in the lives of the people who use them.

CHAPTER 2

INEQUALITY, POVERTY, WELFARE, & THE RISE OF FOOD BANKS IN CANADA

A *Winnipeg Free Press* article (Branswell, 1998:A17) reported that the UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights attacked "Canada's record over the last five years, saying the country has not ensured Canadians enjoyed economic and social rights guaranteed by a UN covenant to which Ottawa is a signatory." The report focused on the fact that such a wealthy country has "crisis levels of homelessness, skyrocketing usage of food banks, deep cuts in welfare rates and inadequate funding for battered women's shelters" (Branswell, 1998:A17). Partial evidence of this is a report prepared by The Canadian Association of Food Banks entitled *HungerCount 1999: A Growing Hunger for Change* (September 1999). The report states that there are 698 food

Table 1.
Food banks in Canada and 1999 HungerCount Survey

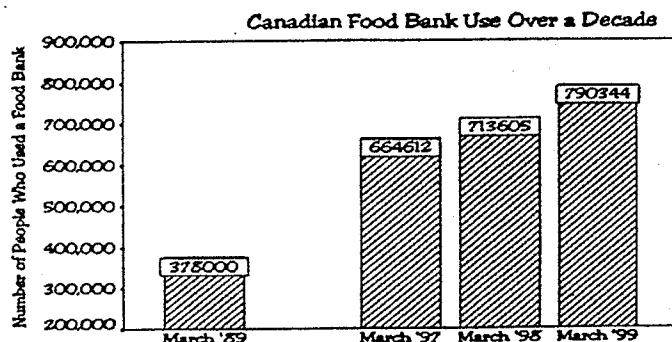
	# food banks not including agencies	# of food banks responding to 1999 HungerCount	% of food banks responding to 1999 HungerCount	# of agencies of responding food banks included in results
Canada	698	459	65.8	2297
British Columbia	87	78	89.7	154
Alberta	80	14	73.7	2
Saskatchewan	19	68	85.0	246
Manitoba	26	10	38.5	230
Ontario	221	148	67.0	534
Quebec	112	26	23.2	1050
New Brunswick	45	42	93.3	13
Nova Scotia	42	36	85.7	56
Newfoundland	54	25	46.3	5
Prince Edward Island	4	4	100.0	7
Yukon	3	3	100.0	0
Northwest Territories	3	3	100.0	0
Nunavut	2	2	100.0	0

Canadian Association of Food Banks (September, 1999:2)

banks in Canada, not including front-line agencies/food banks (see Table 1).

In the month of March 1999, 790,344 people visited a food bank (see Graph 1 & Table 2) with an average of 1 or 2 visits to a food bank per month (see Figure 1).

Graph 1



Canadian Association of Food Banks (September 1999:3)

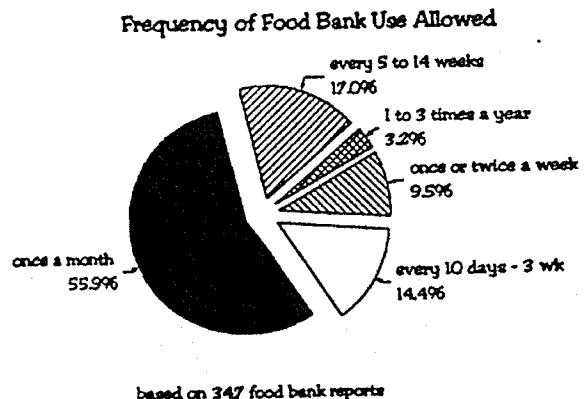
Table 2.
Total Number of People Assisted by Food Banks

All Food Banks			Food Banks Reporting Age Breakdown				Total assisted	Number of Food Banks
	Total Assisted	Provincial Share (%)	Households	Adults	Children			
B.C.	71,139	9.0	20,126	32,671	20,802	53,473	68	
Alberta	50,784	6.4	14,570	21,699	13,873	35,572	43	
Sask.	12,536	1.6	4,648	8,796	8,223	17,019	13	
Man.	34,193	4.3	16,404	19,538	13,130	32,668	8	
Ontario	290,139	36.7	n/a	93,003	68,682	161,685	*	
Quebec	244,043	30.9	3,906	n/a	n/a	n/a	15	
N.B.	22,658	2.9	6,514	10,282	5,703	15,985	31	
N.S.	24,092	3.0	4,786	2,365	1,881	4,246	34	
NFLD	35,794	4.5	976	15,825	10,365	26,190	14	
P.E.I.	4,007	0.5	743	18,968	14,903	33,871	3	
Yukon	309	0.0004	171	263	121	384	2	
NWT	382	0.0005	n/a	70	83	153	2	
Nunavut	268	0.0003	42	56	112	168	1	
TOTAL	790,344	100.0	72,886	311,533	214,744	526,277	234	+Ontario

* Ontario age breakdown figures are based on geographic areas covering 10,240,762 of the provincial population. Household numbers are based on fewer food banks than adult and children numbers.

Canadian Association of Food Banks (September, 1999:4)

Figure 1



Canadian Association of Food Banks (September, 1999:7)

This is more than double the amount from March 1989 where there were only 378,000 food bank recipients (see Graph 1).

The inability to consistently access a good quantity and quality of food through conventional methods of food distribution (ie. supermarkets) is part of the problem of poverty in Canada. If in 1999 approximately three-quarters of a million people in Canada were using a food bank at least once a month, double the amount from a decade ago, then one conclusion that can be drawn is that Canada has a growing problem of inequality and poverty. Specific factors such as underemployment and unemployment, shelter costs, high costs of living, and inadequate welfare benefits have contributed to the increase use and growth of food banks in Canada. However, to understand the underlying, or "macro," causes behind the origin and increase in the number and use of food banks in Canada in the last twenty years, it is necessary to understand what inequality, poverty, and social welfare are in relation to food banks and the contributing political-economic factors.

INEQUALITY AND POVERTY

Inequality

There are many explanations for the need to use food banks by each and every individual food bank client. Explanations range from sudden job loss, mismanagement of funds, unforeseen expenses, and so on. These “micro” explanations only deal with the day-to-day or month-to-month problems that people experience that can contribute to their need for food banks. To have a better understanding to the causes of the rise in the number and use of food banks in Canada over the last twenty years, one must focus on the greater social forces and structures rather than on explanations that “blame the victim.”

Canada is a state society that is based on “classes,” or is stratified into different socio-economic classes. A stratified society, according to Chodkiewicz (1995:260):

is divided into classes, which differ from one another in terms of wealth and control over resources, energy, and other people. Unlike egalitarian societies, stratified societies do not reward generosity: they grant prestige and power to the rich, not to those who give their wealth away. The dominant characteristic of a stratified society is that most of its members are poor and work hard, and that their efforts contribute to maintaining the power and luxury of a small elite.

The stratification of classes is based on entrenched and systemic inequalities. It is inequality, especially in terms of the mal-distribution of income people receive from work or social assistance, that can lead to poverty for those people in the “lower or under classes.”

Canada has a political system of liberal democracy with an economic system of free enterprise capitalism (Allahar & Cote, 1998:16) with relatively strong government interventions (ie. Universal Health Care) so as not to have an entirely “free market”

control every aspect of people's lives. Furthermore, the capitalist system is "premised upon the fundamentally unequal ownership of property and the means of production" which implies basic structured inequalities (Allahar & Cote, 1998:13). If the inequalities become great with larger numbers of people falling into the category of the "lower classes" because they are receiving less resources or income to purchase resources (ie. food, clothing, shelter), the lower classes thus have less power (ie. in terms of political-economic control) that can lead to material deprivation (ie. poverty).

The Canadian economic system is structured in such a way that people require money, for the most part, to purchase the necessities of life (food, clothing, shelter) and non-essential goods (ie. luxury goods, vacations, etc.). Without money people cannot access the dominant points of food distribution (supermarkets) in Canada. It can be argued that the food system in Canada is fundamentally flawed because it is based on food-for-profit and not food-for-sustenance. An abundant supply of food and an efficient method of food distribution exist in Canada. Yet, the "limiting factor" for those who are "poor" and use food banks is that they do not have sufficient funds to consistently take advantage of the dominant form of food distribution. As the Executive Director of the Toronto Daily Bread Food Bank, in an interview with me, claims food banks:

[are] a factor [partially due to] an income distribution problem in our society. It's not a food distribution problem. This is why we don't get into food based kind of solutions. We would oppose government starting to pour money into, actually even children's breakfast, programs. Because it's just another band-aid solution. Let's get at the real thing. Let's get at the real problem.

Thus, a short-term solution to decreasing food bank use would be to put more money into "people's pockets" rather than radically changing the Canadian food distribution system.

There is evidence to show that in Canada over the last twenty years there has been an increasing gap between the rich and poor, where the rich are becoming richer, the poor poorer, while the middle class shrinks. This supports the claim that Canada is a stratified society that is becoming increasingly “class” polarized. According to a study entitled *The Growing Gap: A Report on Growing Inequality Between the Rich and Poor in Canada* (Yalnizyan, 1998:x):

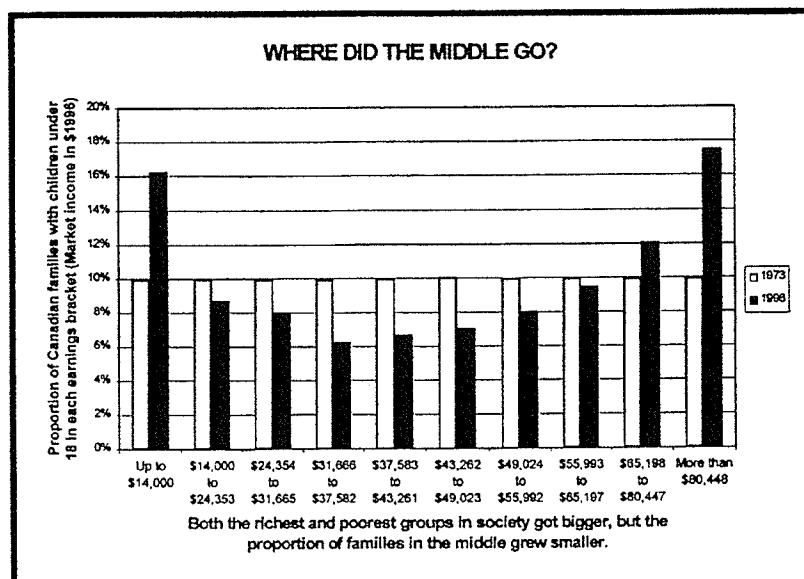
The Rich Are Richer: In 1973, the richest 10% of families with children under 18 made 21 times more than the poorest 10% of Canadian families. In 1996, the richest 10% of families made 314 times more than the poorest 10% of Canadian families.

Shrinking Middle Class: In 1973, 60% of families with children under 18 earned between \$24,500 and \$65,000 (in 1996 dollars). By 1996, that middle class shrank: only 44% of families with dependent children made between \$24,000 and \$65,000.

Most of that change happened in the very middle. Those earning the equivalent of between \$37,000 and \$56,000 in 1973 accounted for 40% of the population. A generation later, only 27% of the population found themselves in the middle.

Graph 2 neatly illustrates the “shrinking middle class.”

Graph 2



Source: Statistics Canada, unpublished data from the Survey of Consumer Finances.

According to Graph 2, it would be safe to assume that the majority of food bank clients over the last twenty years have come from the categories of families with children under 18 who earn up to \$14,000 and between \$14,000 and \$24,353. These are also the socio-economic classes that can be referred to as the “working poor;” those who work, but whose wages are insufficient to make ends meet, especially on a month-to-month basis.

What used to be the earnings cut-off for the poorest 10% of the population (families earning less than \$14,000 a year) now accounted for almost 17% of the population. Similarly the size of the “elite” (families earning more than \$80,500) grew from 10% of the population to 18% (Yalnizyan, 1998:49) (see Graph 2).

One of the major contributing factors to the “growing gap” is the “decline in secure, full-time well-paid work. The pattern [that] emerged in the recession of the early 1980s and picked up steam as a result of the recession at the beginning of the 1990s” (Russell, 1999:A10).

Lack of work, poor job security, and “good” pay are some of the most important factors when considering explanations to the “growing gap” and their links to the growth in the number of food banks and their increased use. Since the early 1980s there has been a trend toward less government regulation in the market place providing for a “laissez-faire” attitude for businesses.

As Yalnizyan (1998:29) explains:

It is true that when the economy reaches a certain pace of growth it provides more opportunities, in the form of more jobs. That threshold of growth has had to get bigger over time for it to generate new jobs, raising concerns about economic sustainability. But even when the jobs start rolling in, the sheer growth in numbers tells us nothing of their hours, their pay, their overall quality. The unwillingness of employers to hire new employees has created a new way of responding to surges in demand. Overtime and just-in-time labour (contract, temps, peak-hour part-time) are the new fixes, even when the “surge” goes on for months. Whereas the strongest area of job creation in the 1980s was part-time work, the most significant source of new jobs in the 1990s has been the rapid

growth of self-employment. This trend has gone hand-in-hand with the downsizing of institutions and the outsourcing of work.

Even with the up and down cycles of the Canadian economy (recession in the early 1980s, prosperity in the late 1980s, recession again in the early 1990s, and back to more prosperous times in the late 1990s) the alarming trend has been a “growing gap” and at the same time the number of food banks (see Table 3) and the number of people using food banks has steadily climbed.

Table 3
Food Banks in Canada, 1981–95

	1981	1984	1988	1991	1994	1995
Newfoundland			1	17	24	20
Prince Edward Island			2	3	5	5
Nova Scotia	2	8	27	32	31	
New Brunswick	2	27	40	40	44	
Quebec*	2	5	11	8	8	
Ontario	4	19	88	175	174	
Manitoba	1	1	4	14	14	
Saskatchewan	5	5	11	19	19	
Alberta	1	12	16	40	63	61
British Columbia	47	42	51	73	76	
NWT				2	2	
Yukon					2	2
CANADA	1	75	126	292	457	456

* Food banks in Quebec are regionally organized.
Source: Riches (1986); Oderkirk (1992); CAFB (1995).

Riches (1997b:49)

Furthermore, the growth in the use of and the growth in the number of food banks have not been affected by the up and down cycles of the economy. Tables 1, 2, 3 and Graph 1 (see above) provide ample evidence of increased food bank growth and use. Hence, *The Globe & Mail's* (Philp, 1998:A7) article on food banks is appropriately entitled “*Food-Bank Users Immune to Economic Good Times.*”

The ramifications of shrinking middle-income groups are not just the polarization of the classes between the “haves” and “have-nots.” As Yalnizyan (1998:49) argues:

the more a society is clustered, perhaps at any point along the income spectrum, the more common is their material experience. This is a powerful unifying force, providing perhaps the key factor leading to greater social cohesion and mutual understanding that can lead to the desire to build together. Growth in the “tails” of the distribution may lead to exactly the opposite result—lack of common experience, and emphasis on “going it alone.”

The claim that less inequality can lead to “greater social cohesion” is not without its merits. As Wilkinson (1996:75-76) claims:

Countries in which the income differences between rich and poor are larger (meaning more or deeper relative poverty) tend to have worse health than countries in which the differences are smaller. It is...the most egalitarian rather than the richest developed countries which have the best health...[For example] Life expectancy in countries like Sweden and Norway, where the poorest 70 percent of households received a larger share of income than elsewhere, is higher than it is in countries like the former West Germany and the United States which were less egalitarian.

An argument can thus be made about growing inequality and the increase use of food banks. Greater inequality can lead to greater poverty. This can lead to less access to the dominant method of food distribution (supermarkets). If good health and longer life expectancy are partially due to factors such as diet and the consistent accessibility to food then it is fair to conclude that growing inequality in income in Canada does play a major role as to how people access food (for many poor it means using food banks) which in turn can have long term affects on the health and material wealth of many Canadian citizens.

Poverty

Greater inequality means greater poverty for those on the lower end of the socio-economic continuum. Poverty is difficult to define because one person’s poverty may be another’s luxury. Attempts to determine what is necessary for basic human survival can

range from the austere (ie. basic necessities to survive: food, clothing, shelter) to the absurdly luxurious (ie. filet mignon for protein). Thus, all definitions of poverty and its measurements (setting poverty lines) are arbitrary, whether they are absolute (market basket) or relative. Poverty, as defined in the introduction, is “material deprivation or a lack of access to material resources” (Goode, 1980 [1972]:376), or as Christopher Sarlo (1996:33) claims, “someone is in a state of poverty if he lacks any item required to maintain long term physical well being.” These are absolute definitions of poverty and assume that there is a certain “cut-off” point for being poor and not poor.

Christopher Sarlo (1996:33), of the “right-wing” Fraser Institute, further asserts:

The notion that poverty is properly defined as the lack of all basic necessities has much to commend it. It does correspond more closely to the traditional understanding of the term. It does lend itself to a constant standard by which progress can be measured. It permits us to determine an interesting and important demographic fact quite independently of the issue of what we will do about it.

A definition of poverty as the “lack of all basic physical necessities” and using that as a “constant standard by which progress can be measured” is simplistic and poverty becomes an either/or situation. If taken literally, the absolute approach can have dangerous ramifications for those who are defined as absolutely poor and to society as a whole. An absolute definition of poverty, especially when set at minimum subsistence levels, is meager in terms of human survival and assumes that anything above absolute poverty is acceptable.

In the absolute case the individual who is poor can suffer physically and psychologically. Furthermore, there are the social and cultural effects of poverty, not only to the poor (ie. ostracism, prejudices, limited opportunities), but also to society as a whole (ie. social unrest, riots, epidemics). The ability (or inability) to access only the

bare necessities of life (food, clothing, shelter) may provide a standard of living that is humanly tolerable. Yet, the quality of life may be such that socially and culturally the poor are still considered poor and deprived by their own and other's standards.

On the other hand, an absolute/market basket approach, when the basket is continuously replenished without duress or difficulty with the necessities deemed appropriate in a given society, has its merits. The Social Planning Council of Winnipeg and Winnipeg Harvest conducted a study called the *Acceptable Living Level* (1997). This report takes “an “absolute” approach to poverty based upon a reasonable but not extravagant expectation of living costs” (1997:iii). The report concludes that a hypothetical family of a single mother with two children (female under 6 and male of 15), living in a city the size of Winnipeg would require a yearly income of \$26,945.60. This is \$1,169.40 below the Low Income Cut Off Line (L.I.C.O.) established by Statistics Canada, based on 1995 figures.

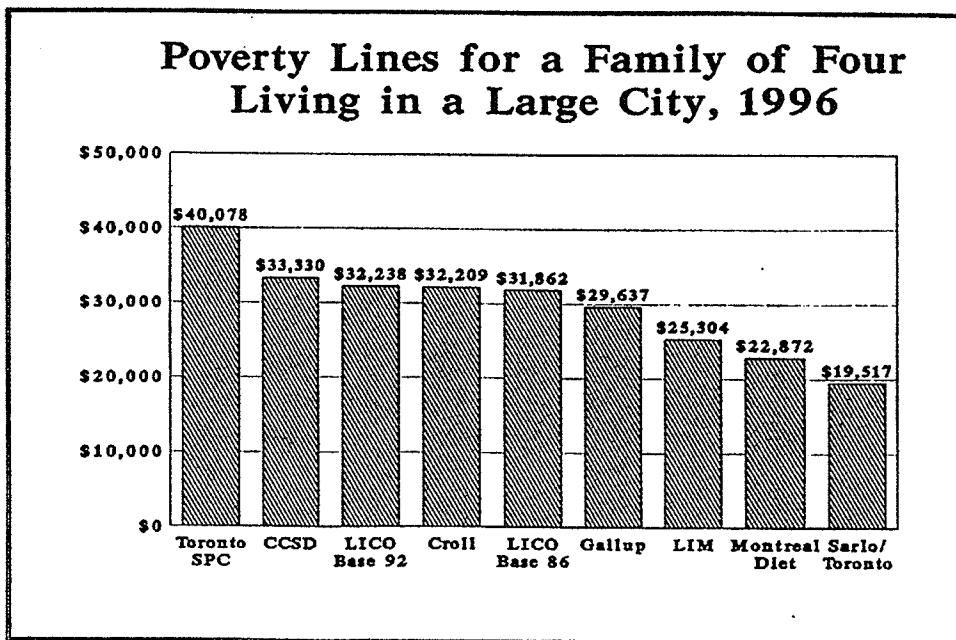
The *Acceptable Living Level* is beneficial as a liberal method of measuring poverty because it highlights the necessary amount of money needed to live comfortably in a city such as Winnipeg. However, the absolute approach only addresses poverty from a dualistic perspective, poor and not poor, and that, standard of living and people's perceptions of a “good quality of life,” often change over time. Establishing a “constant standard” of poverty does not factor in the realities of living in Canada with a fluctuating economy and the higher “quality of life” that is expected in such an affluent country. A better understanding of poverty is through a relative approach which goes beyond basic necessities and can illuminate the inequalities of a society. The economist John Kenneth Galbraith (1984[1958]:233) eloquently states:

People are poverty-stricken when their income, even if adequate for survival, falls radically behind that of the community. Then they cannot have what the larger community regards as the minimum necessary for decency: and they cannot wholly escape, therefore, the judgment of the larger community that they are indecent. They are degraded for, in the literal sense, they live outside the grades or categories which the community regards as acceptable.

By highlighting the inequalities one can begin to get a better perspective not only on who is poor or rich, but the degrees of poverty and wealth along the socio-economic continuum. The relative approach is a useful way of seeing the distribution and mal-distribution of resources in any given society and can expose the inequalities of a stratified society. In relation to food banks, the Galbraith definition of poverty exposes the indecency of using food banks because they are not the common or the appropriate method of acquiring food in Canada.

By analyzing the poverty rates in Canada over the last fifteen to twenty years we can have a sense of how many people are poor; which in turn gives a good indication of who is most at risk of having to use a food bank. In Canada, for the most part, the Low Income Cut-Off Line established by Statistics Canada is used as a basis to measure poverty. Poverty in Canada is also measured by a number of groups (see Graph 3).

Graph 3



National Council of Welfare (Spring 1998:16)

Graph 3 indicates a range of poverty lines (for a family of four in a large city, 500,000 plus) established by various organizations throughout Canada. The most liberal poverty lines, set by the Toronto Social Planning Council, are to the left. The most austere poverty lines fall to the right, with the strictest set by Christopher Sarlo (National Council of Welfare, 1998:7). The Low Income Cut-Off Line is used as the standard for poverty lines in Canada. Yet, Statistics Canada who set the L.I.C.O. "takes pains to avoid references to poverty. It says the cut-offs have no official status, and does not promote their use as poverty lines" (National Council of Welfare, 1998:6).

Table 4, according to the National Council of Welfare, indicates that the number of persons living in poverty in 1980 was just over 3.6 million, with a poverty rate of 15.3%.

Table 4

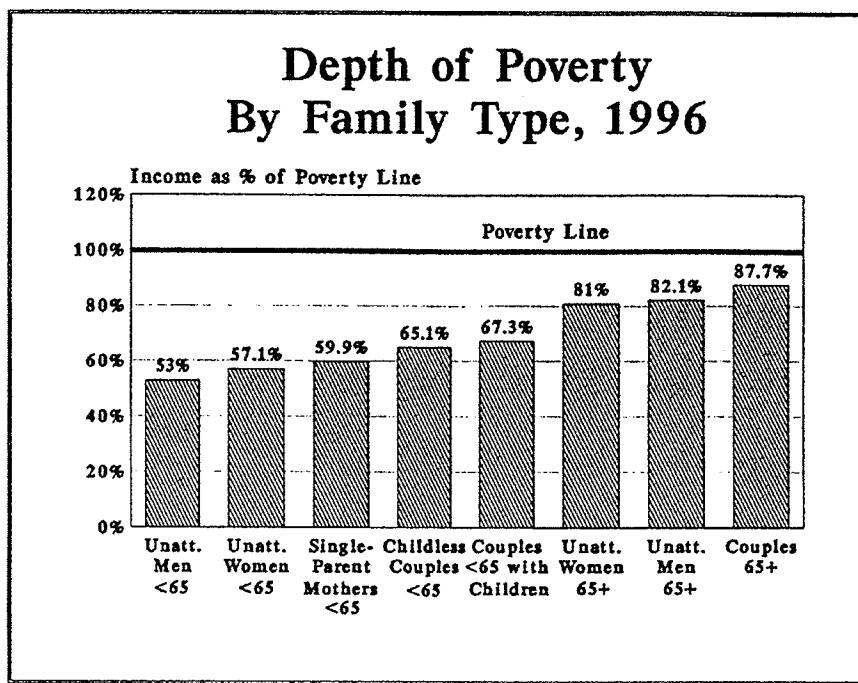
POVERTY TRENDS, ALL PERSONS		
	Number of Persons Living in Poverty	Poverty Rate
1980	3,624,000	15.3%
1981	3,643,000	15.3%
1982	3,951,000	16.4%
1983	4,406,000	18.2%
1984	4,397,000	18.1%
1985	4,170,000	17.0%
1986	3,976,000	16.0%
1987	3,912,000	15.6%
1988	3,744,000	14.8%
1989	3,487,000	13.6%
1990	3,821,000	14.6%
1991	4,227,000	16.0%
1992	4,320,000	16.1%
1993	4,775,000	17.4%
1994	4,795,000	16.6%
1995	5,070,000	17.4%
1996	5,190,000	17.6%

National Council of Welfare (Spring 1998:11)

Both the number of poor people and the poverty rate rose following the recession of 1981-1982, declined slowly through 1989, and rose again with the recession of 1990-1991. Instead of improving after the recession ended, however, poverty rates continued their upward trend. By 1996, the number of poor people was nearly 5.2 million and the poverty rate was 17.6 percent. Both those figures were well above the figures for the years just prior to the last recession. The modest economic growth of the last several years has simply not filtered down to the ranks of the poor (National Council of Welfare, 1998:10).

A corollary to poverty rates is depth of poverty. Being a few dollars below the Low Income Cut-Off Line is not a hardship. As the *Acceptable Living Level* (1997) shows people can live “reasonably” if their income is close to the Low Income Cut-Off Line. When people start falling well below that line we have to begin measuring the severity of poverty by analyzing the depth of poverty. Graph 4 shows the Depth of

Graph 4



National Council of Welfare (Spring 1998:52)

Poverty By Family Type, in 1996.

As Graph 4 indicates those who are “most poor” in Canada tend to be unattached men under 65, then unattached women under 65, then single parent mothers under 65. These three groups happen to be the most likely to use a food bank (see Philp, 2000:A5, Sloan & Stewart 1997, *HungerCount* 1999). Thus, the “depth of poverty statistics...allow us to

calculate the poverty gap to show how much additional income would be need to bring all Canadians out of poverty" (National Council of Welfare, 1998:52).

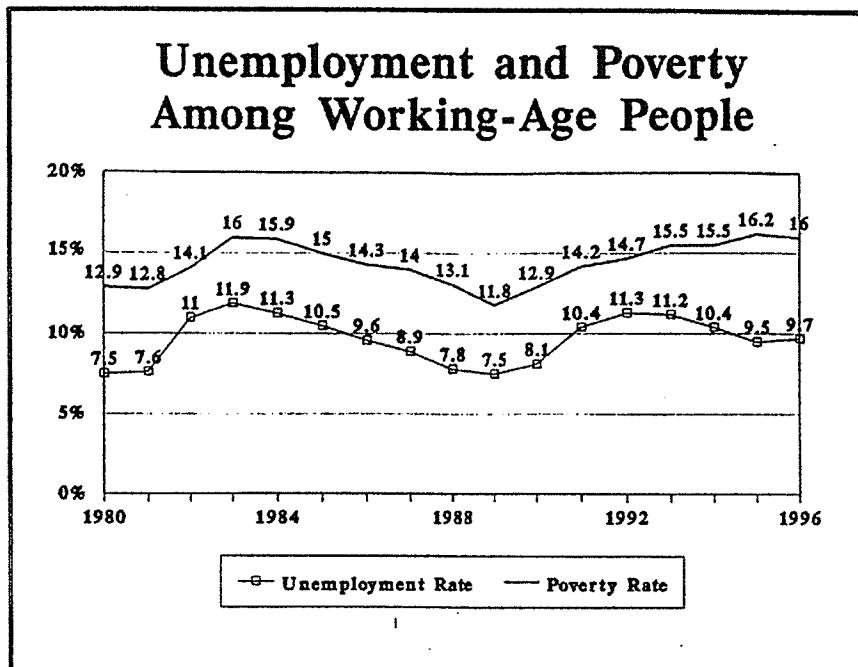
Even though poverty rates fluctuated (according to Table 4 from 1980 to 1996) and the economy went through its usual boom and bust, the number of food banks went up (see Tables 1 & 3). The fluctuating rates of poverty and the increasing numbers of food banks reflect how Canada deals with its poor and hungry.

There are, however, many factors other than inequality that contribute to the causes of poverty and hunger. Riches (1997c:168) states that poverty and "hunger [are] an outcome of prolonged high rates of unemployment and underemployment, [along with] growing inequality in terms of wealth distribution and the declining value of real wages and welfare benefits or purchasing power of households." According to Riches (1997c:168):

massive unemployment since the beginning of the 1980s has placed tremendous pressures on unemployment insurance and public assistance programmes which, it must be recognized were only designed as short-term stopgaps.

Graph 5 indicates the fluctuation of the high rates of both poverty and unemployment rates among working-age people (18-65 years).

Graph 5



National Council of Welfare (Spring 1998:13)

The highest rates of unemployment and poverty were during the early 1980s and 1990s, both recessionary times.

The figures for the rise in the number of food banks, the fluctuation of unemployment rates, and the growing gap suggest that there is a growing stratification and inequality in Canada. Canada is a country that is relatively wealthy, has an abundant supply of food and resources, and has “publicly financed safety nets established to guarantee income entitlements and ensure that basic needs, including that of hunger are met” (Riches, 1997c:168). Yet, even with the “safety nets” in place one can argue that the social welfare system is failing its recipients and is contributing to the increase in food banks and their increased usage.

THE PUBLIC SAFETY NET: WELFARE & FOOD BANKS

One of the biggest complaints of food bank clients is that their welfare benefits are not enough to cover their expenses. If the benefits were sufficient then they would not have to use the food bank. Food bank workers claim that there is a decrease in the number of food bank clients when the welfare cheques come out. One can conclude from this that when people have money, they do not need and probably do not want to use a food bank. However, the welfare cheques are never enough for many food bank clients to cover all monthly expenses. That is why the food banks are still open, because of the inadequacies of the public safety net (ie. social security, welfare).

In the past (and even today) there was an emphasis in social security (ie. welfare) based minimum or residual social security provided by the state or the individual relying on hard work or their family for support in times of need. Prior to the advent of social security in the 1920s the “Protestant Work Ethic” was the dominant ideology in Canada. Guest (1985:2-3) argues that in the past (and even in the present) the private market “operates with a rough kind of justice by rewarding work, foresight, and thrift...If people are improvident, and foolish, they are punished by their inability to obtain the goods and services they need.” The residual role of social security and the individual “Protestant Work Ethic” were consistent with the laissez-faire attitude of the government of the time and with the view that all would benefit from less government intervention (Guest, 1985:2).

The private market and the family ceased to be considered as the only forms of social security. The residual form of social security gave way “to the view that social

security organizations must be designed as a first line of defence" (Guest, 1985:2).

According to Guest (1985:2):

this approach, referred to as the institutional concept of welfare, has resulted from the growing recognition that because of the nature of social organization in an urban-industrial society, the risks to an individual's social security are part of the social costs of operating a society which has provided higher standards of living for more people than ever before in our history. This being the case, it is argued that society should not allow the costs of its progress to fall upon individuals and families, but should protect and compensate people who experience more than their fair share of the costs.

Although the shift from a residual to an institutional role of social security did not really begin to occur until the end of World War II (Guest, 1985:3), it was the "depression of the 1930s [that] was a significant force for change in the development of social security programmes in Canada" (Guest, 1985:93).

Guest (1985:93) claims the effect of the depression of the 1930s "brought home to the average Canadian the interdependence of citizens in an industrial society." He further states that:

Unemployment was seen less as a result of personal inadequacy and more as a common and insurable threat to the livelihood of the average citizen...[T]he concept of local responsibility for the relief of the unemployed was replaced first by the assumption of provincial and then federal responsibility. From this point on, unemployment was seen as a national problem rather than a purely local or regional one (Guest, 1985:93).

However, the rise of social security in Canada can be attributed not just to humanitarianism, social justice, and the responsibility of government. According to Harris (1981:62), "fear that a replay [of the Depression] would lead either to communism or fascism [and] forced the federal government to assume responsibility for regulating the business cycle."

Following the theories of Keynesian economics, downturns in business cycles were to be “controlled by increasing the level of government expenditures, in various combinations as needed” (Harris, 1981:62). What was supposed to happen was that once business picked up, government intervention would then be reversed. However, it became politically difficult to remove any type of government funding, at least to levels prior to the depression (Harris, 1981:62). Furthermore, Harris (1981:62) argues that:

the government’s own role as direct or indirect provider of jobs, grants, pensions, and welfare could not be cut. As a result, each of the five or six recessions that occurred after 1945 left a legacy which made the task of combating inflation progressively more difficult from a political and humanitarian view point.

Social security can be seen not just as a humanitarian gesture and a human right. It is a precautionary measure on the part of government, a form of appeasement for the majority of the population to prevent revolts against the existing government and bureaucracy.

Social security, especially welfare, can be seen as a type of “thought control” (see Harris, 1988:384-388) and food banks having become an extension of welfare only perpetuate this “thought control.” If the majority of the Canadian population is lead to believe that welfare and food banks are doing a good job or that only the “deserving poor” should really be on welfare, then there is no real need to change the formal welfare system along with its informal support system (ie. food banks) for the benefit of the poor.

Regardless of why social security was established in the first place, it can be argued that there are major flaws in its design. According to Riches (1986:86), in Canada the public safety net has not necessarily broken down, but it was “never stitched together properly in the first place. An adequate social minimum safeguarded by full employment and economic growth never got off the ground.” Given the fact that “the

safety net has never guaranteed an adequate social assistance minimum” the “net” seems to have become an entanglement for people rather than a form of support (Riches, 1986:99).

Whether or not the public safety net had been properly assembled, “it is clear that the breakdown of the public safety net is correlated with the rise of neo-conservative policies” (Riches, 1986:101). Social and economic policies reflect values and ideologies of the dominant political and economic system of any society. Therefore, where government revenues are spent will reflect the goals, values, and political/economic priorities of the political party in power (Riches, 1986:102), even if those goals and priorities do not necessarily reflect the values and needs of certain segments of the population.

There has been a definite shift in government ideology over the last twenty years, leaning towards a “neo-liberal” (ie. neo-conservative) philosophy. In the 1980s, inflation was the main issue and unemployment was allowed to grow. When the Mulroney government came to power its prime objective was “the limitation and ultimate reversal of the growth in the public debt” (Riches, 1986:107).

Deficits were seen as the chief obstacles to private sector growth, and investment by the private sector was seen as the key to restoring the economic and social health of Canada. The race to create balanced budgets was on, and privatization, which had been increasingly espoused by provincial governments since the late seventies became the new watchword (Riches, 1986:107).

Furthermore, cutbacks and limits to social spending were and are continually being introduced (Riches, 1985:107). These cutbacks and limitations may be conducive to corporate capitalist growth, but they put severe constraints on anyone who is in a position to require social services.

At the time of the opening of the first food bank in Canada in 1981 (see Table 3) the number of persons living in poverty in Canada and the poverty rate both increased (see Table 4). It can be argued that during this period there is a co-occurrence of rising rates of poverty and diminishing benefits and eligibility for social programs. As Riches (1986:88) states:

Social spending has been restrained in all provinces since at least the mid-seventies. And income security programmes have not escaped the axe. Evidence from a number of provinces shows that benefits have been cut and eligibility criteria tightened. The emphasis is being placed on "screening out" rather than "screening in." Such policies have affected unemployment insurance claimants as well as social assistance applicants.

The effects of cutbacks on social spending can only limit the number of people who qualify for social assistance; only those deemed most in need or the "deserving" poor can qualify for benefits, while the rest are left to fend for themselves.

In recent times, even the Liberal government that is traditionally centred in the middle of the political spectrum has "pursued even more diligently the New Right agenda of its predecessor" (Riches, 1997b:66). The continued cut backs have lead to the dissolution of the Canadian Assistance Plan (CAP), offloading more federal responsibilities to provincial governments (ie. less big government intervention). As Riches (1997b:67) explains:

CAP is being replaced by a new funding mechanism called the Canada Health and Social Transfer (CHST) which is based on a block funding and not conditional cost-shared formula. The effect of this is that the federal government will no longer have to match provincial welfare spending on a shared-cost basis and the provinces will no longer have to meet national standards as a condition for the receipt of the federal transfer payments...The federal government is offloading its spending responsibilities to the provinces and municipalities and...is reversing 'the uploading process resulting from the 1930s' when municipal and provincial governments found themselves fiscally unable to shoulder the costs of welfare relief.

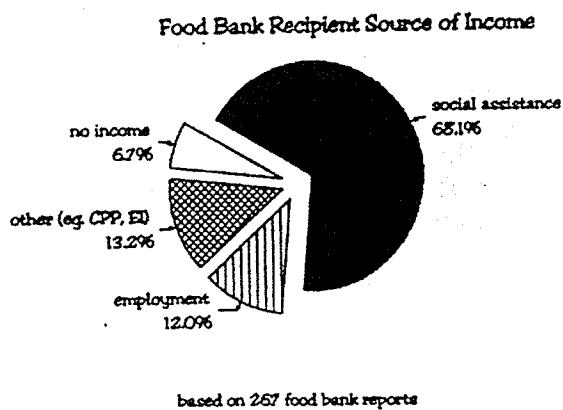
What this new policy has effectively done is “[gutted] guaranteed levels of funding for medicare, education, welfare and social services in order to eliminate the deficit. In exchange for their blessings, the provinces got ‘flexibility’ in program delivery, while the feds, no longer hamstrung by their social obligations, cut transfer payments by 15 per cent in just three years” (Mitchell, 1998:A12).

In other words the provincial governments can do as they see fit with the transfer payments rather than having to come up with a dollar-for-dollar budget for funding under the old plan. This of course can have ramifications for those on welfare, depending on what type of government is in power provincially. The more conservative the government the tougher the welfare system becomes. A good example of this is in the province of Ontario. “More than 200,000 people left welfare across Ontario between June 1995 and [November 1996]. The government says it is certain that cutting welfare rates was the right thing to do, that it prodded chronic claimants into finding jobs” (Lakey, 1996:E1). That is a large number of people to be suddenly taken off of welfare. It begs the question, where did they all go? and did they all find work that necessarily provided wages equal or better than their social assistance?

These economic policies resulted in increasing poverty, especially for the poorest of the poor, thus creating conditions favourable for the growth of food banks. Those people living on welfare (or who may have been forced off it) are now living closer and closer to a type of existence that does not allow them to be able to cope with emergencies and may have difficulty feeding themselves with the little money they receive each

month. (Figure 2 shows that the majority of food bank clients receive their funding from social assistance.)

Figure 2



Canadian Association of Food Banks (September, 1999:6)

Because most expenses (such as rent, utility bills, etc.) are fixed and not elastic (ie. one cannot continually pay half one's rent) food becomes one of the few expenses that can be stretched out. The food bank's role has definitely developed as a stop-gap measure for those who are having difficulty making ends meet (even if they happen to be above the Low Income Cut-Off Line). Food banks became an extension of government as an unofficial social service, particularly for welfare recipients. With growing inequality and poverty and continual cutbacks on welfare there has been a growth in the "charity business," specifically with such problems as hunger being addressed by "band-aid" charitable organizations such as food banks.

As Riches (1997c:170) claims:

It has been a story of offloading welfare responsibilities from national and federal governments to lower levels of government, of developing partnerships with

churches and voluntary sector and insisting that individual and families which, of course, means women, once again, should pick up the burden.

SUMMARY

This chapter has looked at the issues of inequality, poverty, and welfare in Canada and how they have played major roles in the development of food banks in Canada. Specifically, it has been the rise in poverty over the last twenty years, increased inequality between the rich and poor, and a strained welfare system that have lead to the rise in the number of food banks in Canada. The next chapter will look at the main-line food bank in Winnipeg, Winnipeg Harvest, and how this organization runs as a food distribution outlet and how it functions as a type of “egalitarian redistributor.”

CHAPTER 3

MAIN LINE FOOD BANKS: WINNIPEG HARVEST, THE EGALITARIAN REDISTRIBUTORS

Winnipeg Harvest is a food bank. It is a non-profit organization committed to distributing surplus and donated food in Winnipeg, Canada, and the surrounding areas to those people who are struggling to feed themselves and their families (Winnipeg Harvest, 1996). As the Co-ordinator of Winnipeg Harvest asserts, their purpose is to “feed hungry people” (all quotes from the Co-ordinator of Winnipeg Harvest and the Executive Director of the Toronto Daily Bread Food Bank are from interviews with me). This basic purpose is at the core of all food banks and is central to their philosophy. So strong is this belief that it is written in Winnipeg Harvest’s Mission Statement, which reads as follows:

[Winnipeg Harvest is] a non-profit community based organization committed to providing food to people who struggle to feed themselves and their families and to maximize public awareness of hunger (Winnipeg Harvest, 1996).

The problem of feeding people is not only a Winnipeg problem, but also a national one. The Executive Director of the Daily Bread Food Bank in Toronto expresses views similar to those of the people at Winnipeg Harvest, but goes into further detail (a view most likely shared by those working in food bank organizations) by stating:

[Our purpose] also includes understanding better why people need food banks and working towards changing those conditions...So we regard our mandate as essentially a dual mandate; a mandate of doing whatever we can to alleviate hunger, at the same time as we work towards eventually eradicating it.

This dual mandate is reflected by the Winnipeg Harvest’s Co-ordinator’s comments that their short-term goal is “to make sure people eat three meals a day” and

their long term goal “is to close.” Are they accomplishing their goals? “Short term, yes” says Winnipeg Harvest’s Co-ordinator, “long term, no. We’re not able to close yet.”

The Toronto Executive Director further claims that food banks are needed:

Because government policy has failed to ensure the health and safety of all people. Food banks are just a measure of the inadequacy of government policy. And the rise in food banks is a measure of the degree to which government, at all levels, have withdrawn from that kind of support.

These organizations have taken it upon themselves to fill the gaps of failed government policies for those people who have “fallen through the cracks;” “cracks,” especially, in a failing welfare system that has continued to deteriorate over the last twenty years. In attempting to protect people from the effects of the “inadequacy of government policy,” as the Toronto Executive Director claims, food banks, especially Winnipeg Harvest, address the issue of poverty from the ideological stance of an “absolute” or “market basket” approach. The “absolute” approach is not one of poor and not poor, but is “based upon a reasonable but not extravagant expectation of living costs [in the city of Winnipeg]” (Social Planning Council of Winnipeg & Winnipeg Harvest, 1997:iii). Although a relative approach to poverty can be useful, especially when looking at inequality in any society, the “market basket” approach is useful when dealing with the day to day realities of how much money a person needs to survive (the issue of poverty in Canada and Winnipeg is discussed in more depth in Chapter 2). Regardless of what ideological stance food banks take on poverty, be it absolute or relative, they have nonetheless become adaptations to poverty in Canada for the purpose of feeding hungry poor people. Food banks have adapted to the poverty in Canada for the purpose of

feeding hungry poor people. The food bank clients themselves are the ones who use them as one adaptation or survival method in their daily struggles while living in poverty.

FOOD BANKS: THE EGALITARIAN REDISTRIBUTORS

All societies develop methods of food distribution. In North America the dominant method is through profit orient food outlets such as supermarkets. Not all people in Canada are able to consistently buy their groceries from these supermarkets or prepared meals from restaurants. Some people will then turn to food banks for help in supplementing their diets with the unprepared food goods provided by these organizations.

This system of charitable food distribution is similar to egalitarian redistribution systems found in some other societies studied by anthropologists. A good example of this is the redistributive competitive feasting in Melanesia and New Guinea (ie. the Kaoka-speaking people of the Solomon Islands) (Harris, 1974:116).

The way in which egalitarian redistribution functions, according to Marvin Harris (1988:289) is that:

As an egalitarian system of exchange, redistribution is carried out by a redistributor who has worked harder than anyone else producing the items to be given away, who takes the smallest portion or none at all, and who, after it is all over possesses no greater material wealth than anyone else. In its egalitarian form, therefore, redistribution appears to be merely an extreme example of reciprocity; the generous provider gives everything away and for the moment gets nothing in return, except the admiration of those who benefit from the transaction.

The characteristics in this definition of egalitarian redistribution parallel those characteristics found in food banks in Winnipeg and in other food banks in Canada. The

food banks in Winnipeg, especially Winnipeg Harvest the main-line food bank, gather as much food and money as possible through charitable donations from individuals and businesses. Depending on how much food is available at Winnipeg Harvest at any given time, the food will be divided up and distributed as fairly as possible to its various member agencies/front-line food banks, soup kitchens, and other meal programs. The food is further divided up as fairly as possible for the food bank clients (according to the number of people receiving food per household) and given away for free.

This method of food distribution is completely contradictory and incongruent with the dominant profit oriented method of food distribution in Canada that sells food-for-profit. The food banks are organizations providing food-for-sustenance. In the end the food banks are left with the task of having to replenish their own food supply so as to provide more “supplementary” food to their clients, from whom they ask for nothing in return. Furthermore, the prestige or admiration that came with distributing food at competitive feasting is limited and sometimes absent at food banks. This is not to say that food banks clients are not grateful for the food they receive. But the praise is limited, often through the media, directly or indirectly, honouring the efforts made by Winnipeg Harvest and their volunteers. The other groups who end up with praise are the “good corporate citizens” such as Safeway or Peak of the Market who donate food and money. It is odd how businesses like these are giving away food that is unwanted, damaged, or donated (in other words surplus food), because at the same time they are a part of the overall problem of food distribution in Canada; they sell food and some people are not able to buy it.

Thus Winnipeg Harvest is functioning as an adaptation to hunger and poverty. They are attempting to "do as well as possible under the circumstances" (Sahlins, 1964:137) to get food to hungry people. Winnipeg Harvest (and other like-minded organizations) will continue to offer its services to the needy until they are no longer needed.

WINNIPEG HARVEST

Established in 1984 by Lee Newton, Winnipeg Harvest opened with the hope that it would close down within a few years with the return of improved economic conditions.

Lee Newton, who perceived two realities within the community she lived in founded Winnipeg Harvest. She saw that about 20 percent of the good food we have was wasted, while there were hungry people in Winnipeg. She brought those two realities together and formed Winnipeg Harvest (Winnipeg Harvest, 1996).

Unfortunately, Winnipeg Harvest has grown and it is increasingly needed (Winnipeg Harvest, 1996).

According to Riches (1986:30) Winnipeg Harvest falls into the "centralized warehouse approach" to food banks. As centralized warehouses, food banks such as Winnipeg Harvest are:

a non-profit organization for the purpose of collecting, sorting and distributing surplus food (donated/shared), free of charge, to front line agencies [ie. local community or church run food banks] which provide supplementary food and meals to the hungry (Riches, 1986:16).

Furthermore, as Riches (1986:30) goes on to state:

The food banks thereby provide a coordinating function for frontline agencies and are only indirectly involved in giving food. Individuals do not themselves apply to the food bank but have referrals made on their behalf by the agencies. Such food banks would regard themselves as the true example of a food bank.

WINNIPEG HARVEST: A Brief Overview

Winnipeg Harvest is located in the central-western part of Winnipeg in a light industrial area. The building the organization is housed in is a warehouse that looks like many of the other warehouses in the area. Down the road from Winnipeg Harvest are some of the largest, most profitable fast-food restaurants in the world. The juxtaposition of these two very different food distribution systems is quite ironic. In fact, if it wasn't for the sign outside Winnipeg Harvest, no one driving through the drive-thrus or eating their burgers and fries in the sterile utilitarian-type restaurants would even know that Winnipeg's largest food bank is a stone's throw away.

Upon entering Winnipeg Harvest, a sterile environment is the last thing to come to one's mind. Along the walls of the entrance hallway are framed Polaroid photos of "Volunteers of the Month" with anecdotal write-ups of the people. As one ventures further in, there is the reception area and offices. People are constantly moving about, going from one area to the next. The atmosphere is informal. To the outside observer, the place may look run down, even dirty. However, this is not a place for slick looks and corporate aesthetics, but for pride and dignity.

Past the offices are the kitchen and the in-house food bank. Volunteers can be seen sitting about eating, drinking coffee, chatting, or waiting for their turn to claim the food they've earned for volunteering a certain number of hours at Winnipeg Harvest. Past one set of doors from the kitchen is the bread room where older women can be seen in their hairnets sorting through the various breads that have been given to Winnipeg Harvest. Through the other set of doors is the warehouse itself.

Like many warehouses, this one has a basic layout. There are two loading bays where food comes in, or is sent out, and is hauled off the Winnipeg Harvest trucks or other donors' vehicles. The food is immediately piled onto pallets, weighed, and recorded. From there the food is sorted. Perishable goods (ie. certain fruits and vegetables, meats, milk, etc.) are sorted and put into the walk-in coolers and freezers; canned goods (ie. soups, tunas, etc.) and dry goods (pastas, rice, beans, etc.) are sorted by type and placed on shelving in another area of the warehouse.

The difference between this warehouse and those that are part of profit oriented businesses is that the limited funds Winnipeg Harvest has, means that much of the equipment (ie. weighing scales, trucks, forklifts, computers, etc.) are donated or second hand. Thus the efficiency of the warehouse can potentially be compromised by their limited budget. Compared to large supermarkets such as Supervalu or Costco the Winnipeg Harvest warehouse falls far behind in terms of space, equipment, and other resources.

A food bank moves food to people on a limited budget, for free, by whatever means possible and available. Supermarkets, on the other hand, can afford the luxury of purchasing top quality equipment and hire the necessary staff in their purpose to "sell" as much food to their customers.

Working in the warehouse was like working in any other type of warehouse. However there are some differences. The social atmosphere was easy going, as was the attitude of the people working there. For the most part, the people who worked the warehouse were volunteers and many of them were as well clients of the in-house food

bank at Winnipeg Harvest (according to the Co-ordinator 80-85% of the Winnipeg Harvest team uses the food bank).

The young woman who was the warehouse manager at the time of my volunteering was a bundle of energy with a pleasant attitude and a brilliant smile. She was in a position of authority that is normally reserved for males in this type of work environment. But because of the different philosophy at Winnipeg Harvest, one that tries to be fair, inclusive, supportive, and active in social justice issues, work meant being able to do different things in a non-competitive environment. Some people were able to do work that they would sometimes normally never be able to have a chance to do in the profit sector (ie. sit on committees, drive a truck, operate a fork lift). All one had to do was show initiative and ask to try different things. Basically Winnipeg Harvest is run on the enthusiasm and the strength of their volunteers.

The warehouse manager was doing a year of voluntary service as part of a “religious obligation.” As a matter of fact, some of the young men and women who volunteered full time at Winnipeg Harvest, some whom I got to know on a personal level, were volunteering via a program administered by their church. Many of these young adults were from different parts of Canada, others from Europe. Other volunteers were local high school students who needed volunteer experience as a requirement for their high school diplomas, while some volunteers were putting in their “time” as part of their fine-option program. And unfortunately most of them (85%) were basically working for food. These people in some way reminded me of the images one sees, especially in North America cities, where a person on the street will hold up a sign that reads, “will work for food.”

When it came time to work all one had to do was ask: "What can I do?" If something needed to be done, you were asked if you could do the task. No one was ever forced to do anything. Work was accomplished with mutually respectful attitudes between those who ran the warehouse and those who worked there. If I wasn't pushing a broom or loading or unloading a truck, I was driving a van to pick up or drop off food.

At times school children could be seen coming through Winnipeg Harvest on a tour and getting a chance to pitch in and help in the afternoon by boxing or sorting food. The odd time tours would be given by the Co-ordinator to visiting dignitaries or reporters.

Sometimes the most powerful sensation one felt when entering the warehouse was the smell. Food does go bad and this is a reality when dealing with surplus and "older" food. And the smell of rotting potatoes or moldy bread was very powerful. Around harvest time, donations of surplus potatoes, bins of them, would come in from farmers. It was the job of the volunteers to sort through them and clean them out. If pig farmers did not come in to claim the rotting potatoes or bad bread for their livestock, it was then all tossed out. Volunteering can be dirty work sometimes.

Spending time volunteering at Winnipeg Harvest I got to know some people. I tended to associate with the younger volunteers (ie. students). But I never passed up a chance to talk to some of the older volunteers. Especially when riding in the bigger trucks driven by the older men. I heard some of their stories, where they were from and how they ended up at Winnipeg Harvest. Everyone had a different story. But often the people, especially the older volunteers, were there wanting to do something good and constructive with their time.

Sometimes I would hear the odd person complain about one person or another taking food from Winnipeg Harvest without asking. But for the most part I found most turned a blind eye to it. Theft of food was not a problem that I or anyone else really encountered. The punishment for stealing food was being asked to leave. I guess if you had to steal food from a food bank, then, the only question that came to my mind was “How desperate was that person to take food from a food bank?”

This definitely was not a work environment I had ever experienced before, mainly due to the fact that the purpose of the organization was to feed people who were hungry. Having spent enough time there and given the opportunity to travel to various front-line food banks and soup kitchens, I saw where the food came from, where it got sorted, and where it went. And my first experience going to the front-line food banks or soup kitchen (and Winnipeg Harvest itself) was exhausting and depressing. However, this was not always the case and over time I came to a better understanding of the food bank problem. I realized that all these people were just trying to get by and that it was not all about gloom and doom. There were good days and bad days, and that is what life is about.

WINNIPEG HARVEST: THE ORGANIZATION

Winnipeg Harvest, and food banking in Canada in general, have created their own bureaucracy to manage the food they distribute and the people they serve. According to the Executive Director in Toronto:

[We have] created our own little bureaucracy and increasingly managed the neighbourhood food bank agencies, not physically, but we manage how many people come [and] go to certain food banks. We look at neighbourhoods and the

adequacy of service in certain neighbourhoods. We don't open new agencies in neighbourhoods that are already served...lately we've been even actively involved in creating agencies in ill served neighbourhoods. So, we've ended up basically managing the system to maximize the ability of people to get emergency food relief in any given neighbourhood.

Although the Executive Director quoted above discussed food banking in Toronto, the same system can apply in Winnipeg as a way to keep the food banks up and running and supplied with food.

This is not to say that the bureaucracy of the food bank is similar to the "Kafkaesque" labyrinths one encounters when dealing with a large government bureaucracy. But to try and maintain all the food, people, supplies, funding, and so on, food banking has had to become organized. And organization often means bureaucracy. This leads one to question how established charitable welfare is becoming in Canada. Established to the point where, as the Executive Director in Toronto states:

Food banks are becoming more and more entrenched and institutionalization is taking place and if you look now at food banks across the country you'll see that increasing[ly], for instance, they own their own buildings. I think it's terribly symbolic. The big food banks are owning their own property because they reached a point that they can no longer just function on a wing and a prayer. The uncertainty of not knowing if you're going to have a roof over your head next week...so they've had to come to the point, that you know if they're going to operate more and more efficiently, then things like the kind of warehouse and efficient warehouse space...is an issue.

This happens to be the case with Winnipeg Harvest. The Kinsmen Club of Winnipeg purchased the warehouse and offices where Winnipeg Harvest is housed. Recently Winnipeg Harvest expanded its facilities by opening a 16,000 square-foot warehouse next to its existing site with a \$125,000 capital grant provided by the Winnipeg Foundation, a non-profit organization that funds charitable organizations

(Sanders, 2001:A5). Winnipeg Harvest pays all the other costs, for example monthly bills, salaries, taxes, etc., from the funds they raise.

As funding goes, the Co-ordinator at Winnipeg Harvest states:

We don't get it from government, we don't get it from the United Way, we don't get it from lotteries. Not that they're bad people. We just feel we want to stay as entrepreneurial as possible. We want to be able to speak publicly with the issues that we see honestly. Not to run on any political issues, but to just have the freedom to be able to speak publicly. So we get really big support from unions, from business people, from big communities, and from individuals.

Winnipeg Harvest is thus in a position to allocate the resources they receive (ie. the funding and food) in areas they see necessary. Big corporations give money and food; this makes them good "corporate citizens" and it is reinforced by a financial incentive because Winnipeg Harvest is a registered charity. This means tax write-offs for their donations; this includes food that they can no longer sell, although still safe and healthy to consume.

The refusal of government funding can be seen as a form of protest by Winnipeg Harvest and other food banks. As the Executive Director in Toronto states, "if government's going to do something about hunger it shouldn't be through food banks. That's the bottom line reason." Winnipeg Harvest sees government as reneging on its responsibilities to its citizens, in terms of proper social services (ie. welfare), higher wages, etc. They do not want to become a *de facto* agency of the government. They do not believe in supplying food in the manner that food banks are currently distributing it, however the need is so great that they feel they have to continue on their present course. Furthermore, if an organization such as Winnipeg Harvest were to receive government funding, that would mean having to deal with government budgets, which are volatile at

best. And depending on what political party is in power at the time, the possibility for less funding rather than more is a reality. If budget cuts can happen to the welfare system, as has happened in the last few years in Canada, it could happen to food banks.

Hence, receiving funding from everyone but government does make Winnipeg Harvest "entrepreneurial" which gives them the distinct advantage of staying independent. Winnipeg Harvest can thus deal with businesses, communities, groups, and individuals like any other business without having to be held accountable by government pressures or regulations (except for health and safety standards, labour laws, etc.). And furthermore, no business would necessarily want to tar its image by pressuring a charitable organization such as a food bank by telling them how to handle their affairs, what political-economic ideologies to favour, or how to distribute their resources.

Winnipeg Harvest is divided into eleven divisions. They are: Agency Relations, Communications, Corporate Coordination, Operations, Referrals, Research, Special Events, Administrative Support, Human Resources, Public Education, and the Warehouse. The functions of these divisions are described in a Winnipeg Harvest (1999) pamphlet:

Agency Relations: The agency relation portfolio liaisons with front line food bank agencies throughout Manitoba to insure that communication between the agencies and Winnipeg Harvest is open and that food, information and support are shared. The agency relations area also liaisons with community organizations with whom Winnipeg Harvest can contact to assist recipients and team members in crisis if necessary. This liaison provides a resource partnership that enriches Winnipeg Harvest.

Communications: The communications portfolio is responsible for the gathering of information pertaining to the issues of hunger, poverty, unemployment and welfare. The information collected reflects our principles of dignity, compassion and sensitivity. Communications are carried out with the media, government, other agencies, food banks and the community through service clubs, schools, churches and other community groups.

Corporate Coordination: The corporate coordination area is responsible for the development and implementation of a long term plan to increase the quantity and quality of corporate donated food products. This team is responsible for seeking funds and in-kind donations from corporations, the farming community and individuals to help service Winnipeg Harvest.

Operations: The operations portfolio is responsible for the overall coordination of activity at Harvest. This area ensures that people and equipment are appropriately utilized to prepare and deliver food orders in a safe and timely manner. Operations also ensures that food handling techniques maintain the safety of food products.

Referrals: The referral department receives phone calls from individuals requiring supplementary food assistance. Recipients are registered at one of the various food banks throughout the city. Clients who arrive at Winnipeg Harvest are interviewed, served with an emergency food kit, placed at a food bank and if necessary provided with information about community resources to better assist them.

Research: Many requests are received by Harvest for Information. The research area responds not only to these requests but also participates in research in areas of social justice, poverty and hunger.

Special Events: The Special Events area organized 175 special events last year (1998) in the community where donations for the food bank were collected. These events included food drives, benefit concerts, golf tournaments, street fairs, theater nights, conferences and commercial open houses to name only a few. Food is the main objective for every event Winnipeg Harvest puts its name to.

Administrative Support: Answers phones in referrals. Helps coordinate the need of the warehouse and transportation fleet. Provides clerical support in reception area.

Human Resources: Helps maintain volunteer files and records. Supervises groups of volunteers working at Winnipeg Harvest. Provides literacy/nutritional/job search training to volunteers at Harvest.

Public Education: Assists in collecting research materials. Helps maintain the library system. Gathers statistical material from sources within the community. Assists with the writing of briefs and research papers. Assists low income individuals with the issues and concerns that affect their lives.

Warehouse: Where food is delivered to and is sorted and packaged. Food orders are completed there. Food is then shipped out from the warehouse.

From this breakdown of Winnipeg Harvest itself, one can see how complex this organization is.

The type of agencies where food goes to and is picked up by is given in detail in Table 5.

Table 5 Winnipeg Harvest Agency Breakdown

Community Run Food Banks	17%
Church Run Food Banks	12%
Rural Food Programs	13%
Adult Drop In Programs	14%
Youth Drop In Programs	10%
School Programs	10%
Day Care Programs	8%
Group Homes	5%
Soup Kitchens(hot meals)	3%
Community Kitchens	3%
Emergency Programs	3%
Infant Programs	2%
Total	100%
Active Agencies for Sept. 98	199

Winnipeg Harvest (January 18 1999)

The total number of food agencies served is 228 (see Table 6).



Table 6

Winnipeg Harvest Fact Sheet

NUMBER OF	1999	1992	1987
Households	15,800	7,500	1,812
Food Agencies	228	170	100
Team Hours	144,000	34,465	6,509
Pounds of food	5,900,000	2,150,059	835,451
Special Events	243	70	5

Winnipeg Harvest (July 1999)

The figures in Table 5 give a percentage breakdown and the types of organizations that are supplied by Winnipeg Harvest. Community and Church run food banks top the list in terms of the number of emergency food programs supported by Winnipeg Harvest (Winnipeg Harvest, 1999). This is not to say that the other food programs are not essential, but it is obvious from the numbers in Table 5 that food banks are probably the first line of defence and the number one food program for most people who need an emergency supply of food, in Winnipeg, as supplied by Winnipeg Harvest.

It was not possible for me to be involved in every aspect of Winnipeg Harvest. The extent of my involvement was limited to the Warehouse and the Public Education divisions. It was through my involvement in these two areas that I gained the greatest appreciation for the actual functioning of a food bank. As a member of the Public Education division I sat in on meetings that discussed various poverty and food bank

issues and I became involved with the implementation of the Winnipeg Harvest food bank survey conducted at the various front-line food banks throughout Winnipeg. Working in the warehouse I had to physically work with the food that was brought in, sorted out, and redistributed. This experience gave me a “hands-on” sense of what Winnipeg Harvest was about, getting food to people.

FLOW OF PEOPLE, FLOW OF FOOD

Winnipeg Harvest is an organization to deal with people who need food. Therefore, there is a flow of food and a flow of people in and out of Winnipeg Harvest. Unfortunately there tends to be more people in need of food than there is food available.

THE PEOPLE

When a person is in need of food from a food bank in Winnipeg, he or she will eventually end up at Winnipeg Harvest. They will either end up on their front door step or talk to someone over the phone in their referrals department. Other than the food or emergency supplies given out for a first time food bank client who shows up at Winnipeg Harvest, the referrals department is probably the most important aspect of Winnipeg Harvest for a food bank client. This is the client’s point of actual communication with the food bank where the client phones and talks to a Winnipeg Harvest volunteer. This is the client’s food line. The volunteer takes down the client’s necessary information (ie. health card number, number of people in the household requiring food) and advises the client when and where to pick up their food.

In order to obtain a food basket, a person is required to telephone the Winnipeg Harvest food bank referral line. Because the amount of food a food bank receives is a function of the number of referrals, the Winnipeg Harvest food bank system encourages registration and therefore constrains the number of walk-in recipients. After providing information related to the number of people in the household, address, and Manitoba Health registration number [as a way of keeping track of people], the caller is referred to a food bank nearest to his/her residence. The client is told the time and day that the food bank runs...Winnipeg Harvest records the caller's request on the appropriate food bank 'roster' so that the quantity of food sent matches the number of clients referred (Sloan and Stewart, 1997:18).

The client is usually limited to two maybe three visits a month to a food bank, with the average supply of food lasting only 2-4 days, depending on the type of food given out and the budgeting skills of the individual(s).

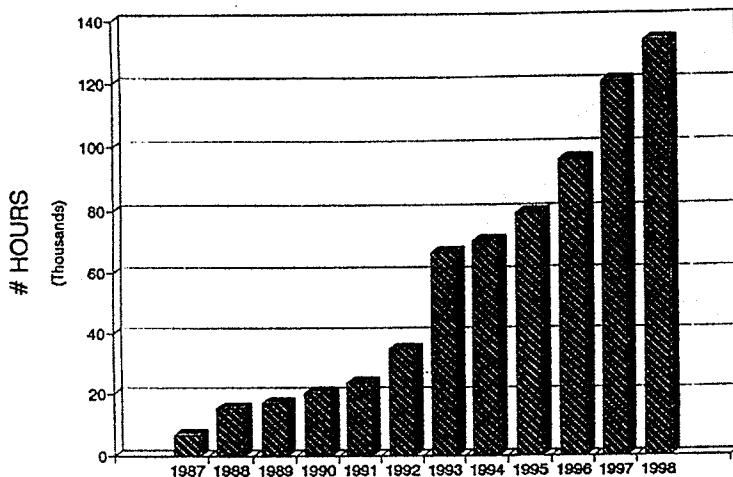
According to a Winnipeg Harvest Fact Sheet (see Table 6) the number of households served in 1999 was 15,800 with an average household size of 2.3-2.8 members. These figures are substantially higher than those for previous years of 1992 and 1987 (see Table 6) (Winnipeg Harvest, 1999).

The Winnipeg Harvest survey of food bank clients, *Hunger Barometer* (Spring, 1998), offers startling statistics. Approximately 35,000 people receive food from Winnipeg Harvest each month. 54.5% are female and 45.5% are male. Two out of five of the people are children (41%), which means, "considering the Manitoba population as a whole, Winnipeg Harvest serves a disproportionate number of children. Children and youth make up 26% of Winnipeg's population" (*Hunger Barometer*, Spring 1998:2).

Volunteers primarily staff Winnipeg Harvest with a small number of paid employees. Graph 6 shows the number of volunteer hours dedicated to Winnipeg Harvest over the years, increasing every year with 144,000 team hours in 1999 (see Table 6).

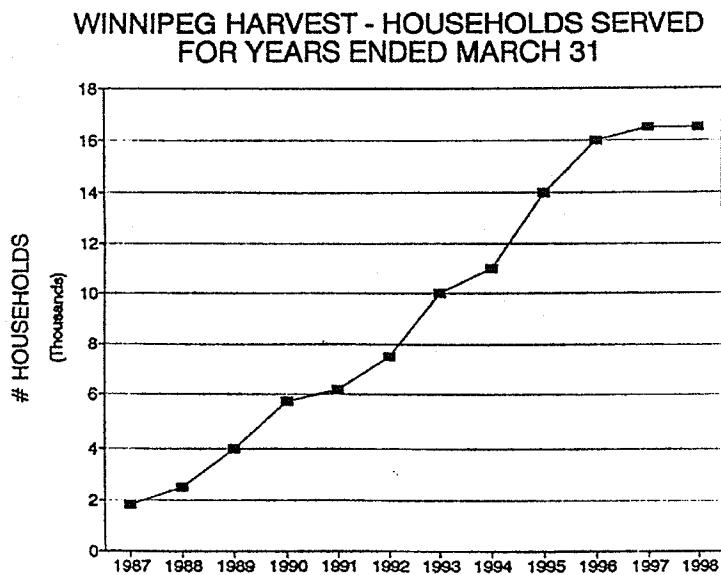
Graph 6
(Winnipeg Harvest 1999)

WINNIPEG HARVEST INC
VOLUNTEER HOURS BY YEARS ENDED MARCH 31



The number of households served over the years has increased substantially also (see Graph 7), reaching 15,800 in 1999 (see Table 5).

Graph 7
(Winnipeg Harvest 1999)



What these trends show is that there is definitely a growing need for Winnipeg Harvest especially in the number of people involved, in terms of volunteers and clients.

THE FOOD

“We’ll distribute any kind of foods we can get,” states the Co-ordinator of Winnipeg Harvest. As the saying goes “beggars can’t be choosers” so the food bank, like its clients, will take quantity and any good quality of food it can get and from as many sources as possible (ie. individuals, food drives, corporate donors, etc.). The bulk of the food is provided by the food industry. As the Co-ordinator of Winnipeg Harvest states:

In the three food categories we’ll primarily distribute breads and cereals and secondarily vegetables and some fruits and alternatives and very little meat products because we just can’t get that product.

There are of course the canned goods (ie. tuna, soups, etc.) that are donated and distributed.

The Winnipeg Harvest "Ten Most Wanted List" of foods desired are: 1) canned meat and fish, 2) cereal, 3) macaroni and cheese, 4) dry pasta, 5) canned vegetables, 6) canned soup, 7) canned fruit, 8) canned stews, 9) peanut butter, and 10) spaghetti sauce. Although the ideal would be to get people fresh food, such as fruits and vegetables along with choice meats and milk products, foodstuffs such as these are not in abundance at Winnipeg Harvest. The "top ten list" of foods are the type of products that are nutritious and at the same time are the types of products that can be easily donated by individuals. For example, the can of tomato soup one may have sitting around in the cupboard for a few months. Food can be donated at food drives or at a local supermarket that will have a Winnipeg Harvest bin set up so customers can drop off food that they may already have purchased. Safeway has gone as far as providing pre-set packages of food that customers can purchase and that are then dropped off in the Winnipeg Harvest box at the store.

The Co-ordinator explains that food from Winnipeg Harvest is distributed to people in two ways:

One, we do it right through our front door. We have a food bank in the food bank that distributes food. That is for team people and people who live within walking distance of Winnipeg Harvest. People that come in the front door [ie. first time walk-ins], we're not going to turn them away. And the second thing we do is we move food off to agencies in Winnipeg...In Winnipeg there's about 240 or so food programs that are run that we share food with.

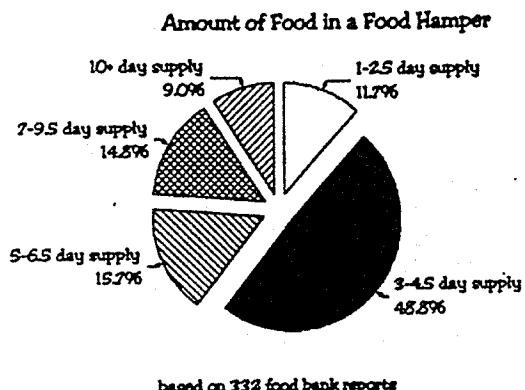
The food is trucked in, sorted, and shipped out, or even picked up by the agency itself.

Eventually the flow of people and the flow of food meet at one of the various food agencies. This concentrated effort, of volunteers and staff at Winnipeg Harvest and

the member agencies and the clients themselves who have to get to the actual point of distribution, results hopefully in, the individual picking up their supply of food.

According to *HungerCount 1999*, the national survey on food banks (September 1999), the actual amount of food received by clients will last less than five days (see Figure 3).

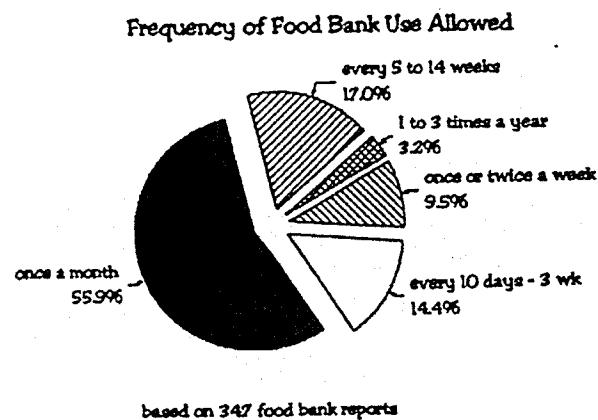
Figure 3



Canadian Association of Food Banks (September, 1999:7)

This is the average, although some food banks, depending on how much food is available, will be able to provide more food that can last more days. The frequency of use of a food bank is, on average, about once a month (see Figure 1--same figure as in Chapter 2).

Figure 1



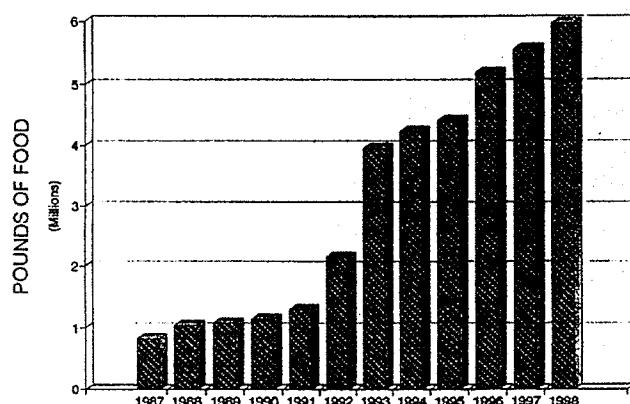
Canadian Association of Food Banks (September, 1999:7)

"Most [food banks] try to provide people with food once each month, barring emergencies...Where food banks provide larger supplies of food, generally recipients get more food but far less often" (*HungerCount 1999*, September 1999:7).

In 1999 Winnipeg Harvest received 5.9 million pounds of food (see Table 6). Graph 8 shows that the amount of food Winnipeg Harvest has received over the years grew almost exponentially.

Graph 8
(Winnipeg Harvest 1999)

WINNIPEG HARVEST INC
FOOD DONATIONS BY YEARS ENDED MARCH 31



Close to six million pounds of food was donated in 1999 and people are still lining up for food. This surplus of food also raises the question of the “over production of food” and its unnecessary disposal (ie. produce going bad, dented cans, etc). Although the food the clients receive from Winnipeg Harvest is on a whole good, it is still unwanted or surplus food.

FEAST & FAMINE: DAYS OF PLENTY & DAYS OF NEED

Like its clients Winnipeg Harvest has its times of plenty and its times of need. For the client, the times of need tend to be in emergency situations (ie. unforeseen expenses, loss of money, etc.) or when the welfare cheque dwindles down to nothing. As I was told by one food bank volunteer, “when the welfare cheques have run out the food

banks start to fill up.” Winnipeg Harvest also has times when they run short of food, and they can only give out what they receive.

For Winnipeg Harvest, it is a constant struggle to keep their own shelves stocked and a struggle to get enough food to people. Food banks have to spread out the food they have to as many people as possible. Food banks do the same thing that their clients do; make do with what they have, which sometimes means not having enough food. Furthermore, there is never a surplus of food. As the Co-ordinator claims:

The only surplus of food that we get that is surplus, is food that can't be consumed by humans. That stuff we move off to pig farmers. It's a seasonal thing. It depends on the quality of the product that comes in to us. In one of the distribution channels, if there's a wholesaler that has a semi-load or something coming in and it is frozen on the outside edges, we may lose half the product. Other times we may lose only 5 or 6 percent.

If the food is bad it gets tossed out. And for the most part the food is good. “[It] meets and exceeds health standards. It's marketable food,” states the Co-ordinator. The food is also much better than in previous years. “[The food] was terrible in the beginning stages” as the Co-ordinator goes on to say.

The fact that the quality of food has improved on a whole can be attributed to: 1) the efforts of Winnipeg Harvest, and 2) food banks having become more established and that means greater expectations on the part of food banks to provide even better food. This is not to say that food banks in the past wanted to give out bad food, but since food banks have taken on greater responsibilities their own expectations have risen to provide the best possible food.

The high and low points of food donation to food banks are often seasonal and partly determined by food banks’ exposure in the media. The Co-ordinator states:

Product coming in from the public is when we are mentioned in the media. People remember that it's [hunger] an issue and then the donation follows for many days and a couple of weeks afterwards. So Christmas is high. January and February are low [usually due to people paying down Christmas bills]. March and April go high again because we're public, and we've got a food campaign then.

When there is a shortage of food Winnipeg Harvest has three main methods of procuring food. As the Co-ordinator asserts:

One, we'll go back to the distribution channels, the surplus distribution channels and visit them aggressively. The wholesalers, the retailers, the food manufacturers. Those distribution channels. The second distribution channel we go back to is our public domain, asking them for further donations. The third thing we'll do, depending on what kind of support we can get, from some companies, we'll go buy groceries. We buy very little.

When Winnipeg Harvest does run low on food or wants to address certain issues concerning poverty and hunger, it turns to the media.

CALLING FOR HELP: THE ROLE OF THE MEDIA

"You've got to be on top of your media for starters," says the Executive Director of the Toronto Daily Food Bank. The media is a powerful tool for food banks. It is the primary way for food banks to get their message out that they, 1) need food and 2) that there is a problem of poverty and hunger in Winnipeg and Canada. As the Executive Director asserts:

The good food banks are good at media and good at using it. We don't have public relations firms. Our one thing is how we can be nosey and stay in the media and to talk about the issues. I think it's exactly what food banks have to do. Be there with the information. I think information is real power...It's always the public that you need to go after.

And it is the public who reads the newspapers, watches the television new broadcasts, and listens to the radio announcements. This is how food banks, especially the larger

ones who have a large volunteer base and many full time workers, get their message to the public, businesses, and government.

The media, because of its proliferation in Canadian society (ie. TV, radio, newspapers, and internet), is an ideal forum to discuss the issues of food banking and poverty and to increase their exposure to the general public. At least once a month there is an article on food banks or articles that relate to food banks (ie. poverty, budget cuts to welfare, wage rates) in the three major newspapers in Winnipeg. It is an issue that is rigorously pursued in the media by the people at Winnipeg Harvest and it is important enough that the newspapers and other forms of media cannot ignore it. This is not just a matter of “the squeaky wheel gets the attention” by bothersome poverty advocates. It is rather a major issue that must be addressed, because the numbers of food bank customers have swelled over the last twenty years.

If Winnipeg Harvest is not in the news promoting a food drive at Christmas or Thanksgiving they can be found at other events, for example, at a Winnipeg Blue Bomber’s football game. They make themselves known to the public. At one game, as reported in the *Winnipeg Sun*, in 1999 the fans donated 26,980 pounds of food that was matched by Peak of the Market (Lunney, 1999:2). This is a perfect example of combining a large sporting event with many people, the media, and big business. This is how Winnipeg Harvest keeps itself stocked with food while getting their message of hunger and poverty to the public via a public event combined with the media.

Often, the person who is most quoted in the newspapers or is on television or radio in Winnipeg is the Co-ordinator. It takes a charismatic personality (somewhat akin to a Melanesian “Big Man”) to keep this issue alive in the media. However, rather than

boasting about how much the food banks have, they end up “begging” for more, and saying how little there is at times on their storage shelves. The Co-ordinator at Winnipeg Harvest is the person who is most recognized when the word food bank comes up and is often on one radio or television program or another, attracting attention to the needs of Winnipeg Harvest and to the general problems of poverty.

THE TWO SOLITUDES: FEEDING WINNIPEG, THE CITY OF POVERTY

Food banking in general and Winnipeg Harvest specifically, provide food both urban to and rural areas. Table 1 shows that Winnipeg Harvest provides food principally to urban food banks and other types of food programs (ie. soup kitchens), but also contributes to rural food banks. A *Winnipeg Free Press* article reports that the number of rural food banks that Winnipeg Harvest is in contact with has increased over the years, from 20 in 1995 to 34 in 2000 (MacKenzie, 2000:A11). This is indicative of the fact that the lack of food security is not just an urban problem but a rural one as well. This is shocking especially because the economy of the province of Manitoba is based primarily on agriculture.

However, food banking is still predominantly an urban phenomenon that can be related to urban poverty. According to the *Globe and Mail*, “the number of poor people living in Canada’s big cities soared by almost 34 percent between 1990 and 1995” (Picard, 2000:A5). The study this article was based on was conducted during:

an economic downturn, and it appears the poor, particularly those in urban areas, were the worst hit...[B]ecause the report is based on 1995 numbers, it does not reflect the boom in the economy in the past five years. But the evidence suggests that poor groups have benefited the least from these improvements. While the

labour market has improved, many income-security programs have been slashed (Picard, 2000:A5).

The poor, especially food bank users, have been immune to the economic good times.

Another *Globe and Mail* article, using figures from the Canadian Association of Food banks survey *HungerCount 1998*, supports this by stating that:

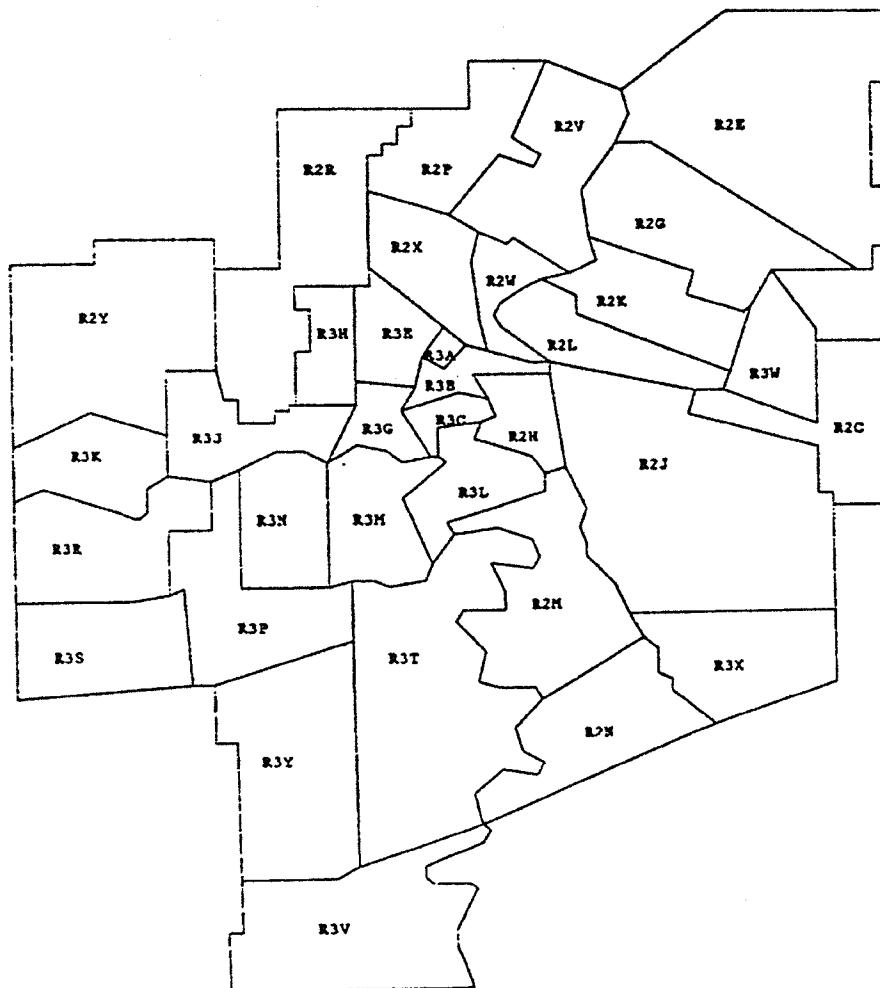
As the economic good times rolled across Canada last year, the number of Canadians shuffling into hamper rooms for emergency rations by March had increased 5.4 percent in the span of a year. In all, 716,496 people used one of the country's 2,141 food banks during the month—about 2.4 percent of the country's entire population. Of those, a startling 41.5 percent were children, although children represent just 25 percent of the Canadian population as a whole (Philp, 1998:A7).

The poor have not been able to reap the benefits of the upswing in the national economy. Since Canada is primarily an urbanized society this leads to urban poverty. This is one explanation of why the majority of food bank clients are urban dwellers. “The poor are becoming far more concentrated not only in urban areas, but in the core of big cities—much as they are in the United States” (Picard, 2000:A5). The city of Winnipeg is a prime example of this problem with concentrations of poverty in the central or “core area” of Winnipeg or its “North End” along Main Street.

Winnipeg can be seen as a city of two solitudes: The “core area,” known for its high poverty rates and urban decay, and the sprawling suburbs with their middle and upper-middle class neighbourhoods. Hence, a “donut” or “ring” city has developed over time with less affluent people concentrated in the centre of Winnipeg and the level of poverty decreasing towards the outer regions, which is typical of many post World War Two North American cities.

Unfortunately, Winnipeg has developed a reputation as being a “poor” city. In 1998, Winnipeg had two of the poorest neighbourhoods (using postal codes to determine the region) in Canada, with an individual annual median income of \$11,000 for area R3A and \$11,100 for area R3B (McArthur, 1998:A3). Both neighbourhoods happen to be in the “core area” of Winnipeg (see Map1).

MAP 1: WINNIPEG FSA LOCATION

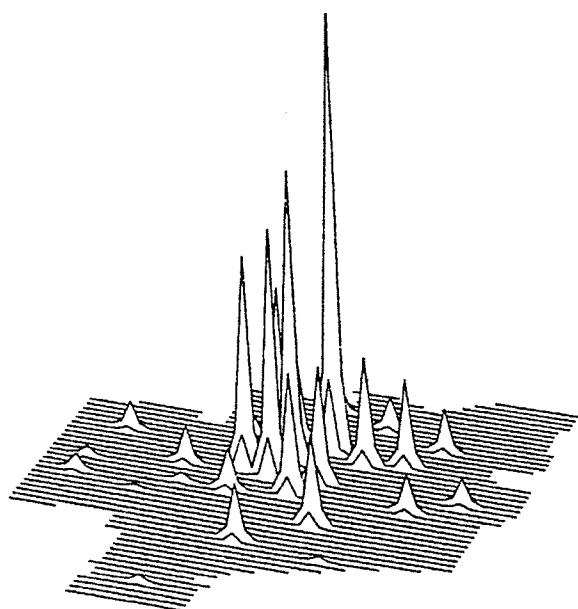


Sloan & Stewart (1997:Appendix F, Map 1)

According to the figures and maps of Sloan and Stewart (1997), there is a strong correlation between Winnipeg's urban core poverty and food bank use. Sloan and Stewart (1997:22) used the Forward Sortation Areas (FSA's, first three digits of the postal codes according to the same process used by the post office) as a way to "construct a referral map showing the geographic distribution of food bank users in the city." (see Map 1)

Map 2 "depicts the relative intensity of activity across Winnipeg by way of a surface map. The larger spikes, representing greater numbers of food bank users in those areas, are clearly concentrated in the city centre" (Sloan & Stewart, 1997:23).

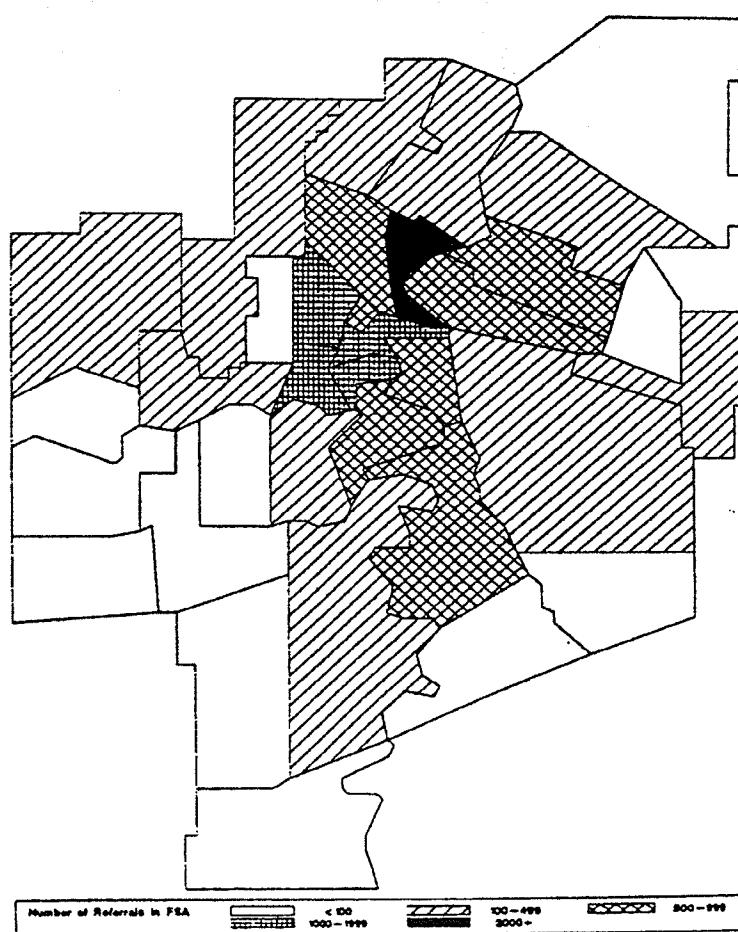
MAP 2: WINNIPEG HARVEST HISTORICAL DATABASE
LOCATION OF 16,684 CLIENT REFERRALS 1988 — JUNE 1993
THE HEIGHT OF EACH SPINE REPRESENTS THE NUMBER OF REFERRALS WITHIN AN FSA



Sloan & Stewart (1997:Appendix F, Map 2)

Map 3 shows the “geographical location of food bank users by FSA on a choropleth map where hatching represents the relative intensity of activity in each FSA” (Sloan & Stewart, 1997:23).

**MAP 3: WINNIPEG HARVEST HISTORICAL DATABASE
LOCATION OF 16,684 CLIENT REFERRALS 1988 – JUNE 1993**



Sloan & Stewart (1997:Appendix F, Map 3)

In other words, a quick glance at Maps 2 & 3 indicate heavier food bank use in the “core area” of the city and a diminishing usage or no use at all in the outer parts of the city.

As Sloan and Stewart (1997:x) state:

Strong evidence appeared linking the socioeconomic status of a neighborhood with the degree of food bank activity...This disputes the contention that food banks appear in well-to-do neighborhoods and will generate activity by their mere existence.

Thus, the “build it and they will come” motto does not fit. Food banks exist because there is a need for them and the need happens to be in the poorer “core area” of Winnipeg.

There are various explanations for the downfall of the “core area.” They are not necessarily directly related to food banking, but do contribute to the overall problem of urban poverty in Winnipeg, and poverty is directly related to food banking. There is the “urban myth that downtown is hell and the suburbs are heaven [which] is contributing to the urban sprawl problem” (Connor, 2000:11). However, beyond people’s attitudes about living in the “core area” there are various socio-economic explanations contributing to the poverty in this area. As Scarth (1999:A11) claims:

During the 1970’s, the city went on a capital spending spree, building a series of new and expanded roads and bridges, the bulk of which lead out of the downtown. These expenditures made it easier to live outside the inner city and fueled suburban expansion.

Furthermore, the province of Manitoba has used “grants...to pay for infrastructure in ring communities, which have helped keep their taxes low” (Redekop, 1999:A6). Thus, the exodus out of the city has seen the inner city lose more than 13,000 people in twenty

years. Furthermore, the value of the homes in the area has depreciated from an average of \$40,000 to \$20,000 (Mitchell, 1999:B1).

This has had an impact in the area. The out-migration from the “core area” has “depleted the city’s tax base [and] reduced demand for city homes and held down their prices. That, too, cuts into the city’s property taxes. When home prices rise, the city receives more tax revenues without having to raise taxes” (Redekop, 1999:A6). But the reality is that if reassessment of the area were to occur to reflect the true market value, the “city would lose millions in property taxes” (Mitchell, 1999:B1). Hence, the city has to try not only to raise the value of the homes in the inner city to keep precious tax revenues, but also to make sure they are not depreciated in value.

Another factor to take into account is the lack of “more independent political authority and more sources of revenue if [Canadian cities] are to avoid the downward spiral that engulfed American metropolises 30 years ago” (O’Brien, 2001:A1). The argument is made that cities “can’t continue to fund public transit, roads, sewer and water, social and health services—many of which were downloaded from other levels of government—on the backs of property owners” (O’Brien, 2001:A2). Since Canada is primarily an urban society the cities are providing the majority of funds for federal and provincial governments through GST, PST, income tax, business tax, and so on. Yet, the cities do not see this revenue and rely primarily on land taxes for their revenues putting them in financial strains and debt (O’Brien, 2001:A2).

These explanations of the problems of the “core area” of Winnipeg may not necessarily be directly related to the rise in the number of food banks in Winnipeg and increased food bank use over the last few years. But the problems of urban-core poverty

are significant factors that must be addressed. In the case of Winnipeg, it happens to be in the downtown "core area." While urban poverty may be an issue that is related to food banking it does not have to limit the way Winnipeg Harvest functions or how food bank clients live in their city. Winnipeg Harvest, in a sense, has taken steps to promote a type of growth in their city, not necessarily economic, but social by trying to be one organization that is part of the city that believes in a type of "community spirit."

THE COMMUNITY MODEL OF FOOD BANKING

The way in which Winnipeg Harvest organizes itself with its member agencies/front line food banks is through a community/neighbourhood model. As the Co-ordinator of Winnipeg Harvest claims, it would be:

Easier to have everybody come to one central site. Operationally it would be easier if everybody came here to pick up their pre-set hamper and go home. Philosophically, it's easier to work with the model we've got, which means [working] with groups and neighbourhoods.

In one sense, having one main food bank is beneficial for co-ordinating all the various meal programs within the city of Winnipeg. Rather than each food program having to fend for itself in terms of funding and obtaining food, Winnipeg Harvest can take on that role. Big business (ie. Safeway) would prefer one agency (ie. Winnipeg Harvest) to do the entire running around rather than having hundreds of different meal programs approaching them at different times. Winnipeg Harvest takes the role of mediator between the big businesses and the front-line agencies.

However, the purpose of Winnipeg Harvest goes beyond donating food. The Co-ordinator's views on the community model of food banking try to encompass an

empowerment strategy for the groups and individuals who are using food banks. As he states:

There are two issues in community development. One of them is the sense of community, which is feeling good together. And then the mutual dependency issues which we endorse and support. We've developed a team at Winnipeg Harvest that follows the sense of [a] community model. And sense of community means bringing the right chemistry together and a nurturing environment. [The] majority of our team, 80-85 percent of our team are people who use the food bank, so that sense of community is very important. The second piece is community control. Having the community self determining, being able to participate in its own decision-making. Take ownership and control of its environment. It's easier to do it on a neighbourhood level than on a broad provincial level. We don't have the strength to do it provincially. So that's why we picked this model. We're concerned about sense of community and we're concerned about community control.

To understand the community approach to food banking we must first understand what community means. One way of defining the term community, according to Douglas (1986:26), is that:

the community is by definition small, face-to-face, in its interactions, and many-sided in its relationships. Second, participation in its decision-making processes is widespread. Third, the members of a community hold beliefs and values in common; its most perfect example would be fully consensual. Fourth, it holds together by virtue of a network of reciprocal exchanges.

A current example in Canadian society that comes closest to the community model described above would be a Hutterite colony. However, in urban Canada, "communities" are at best, neighbourhoods; areas that have loose-knit geo-political boundaries, a human geographic history, similar architecture (ie. planned neighbourhoods), with some residents tending to be within similar socio-economic classes (ie. Tuxedo) or ethnic milieus (ie. Little Italy). Yet, most people do not necessarily know their neighbours, and the "potential for cohesion is often not realized because communities are not

homogeneous but rather consist of social groups and classes whose interests may not coincide" (Loxley, 1986:6).

This has not necessarily prevented an organization such as Winnipeg Harvest from attempting to meet the needs of the people who need help in the various neighbourhoods of Winnipeg. As Hedican (1995:48) states:

The fact that divergent interest groups exist in society means that researchers [and activist organizations and organizations such as Winnipeg Harvest] must at times serve in intermediary positions, or as bridges of understanding to permit otherwise antagonistic groups to work with one another.

If success is to occur for any type of project at the "community" or neighbourhood level, be it running a food bank or working towards closing them, then one must understand of the structures such as social differentiation and heterogeneity (Loxley, 1986:6) within neighbourhoods/communities and Canadian society. Furthermore, the broader societal structures and institutions in which communities and neighbourhoods are encapsulated must also be analyzed to see where power relations exist that influence the organization and functioning of these communities and neighbourhoods.

The challenge for "community or neighbourhood development," according to the Co-ordinator, is to strive for: 1) meeting basic human needs, 2) self-help for individuals and various groups in the community, 3) working for change, and 4) having some sort of spiritual essence (whatever way one may define that). How organizations like Winnipeg Harvest and other ones like it go about creating "community development," is difficult to assess. The challenge that the Co-ordinator and Winnipeg Harvest have set out for themselves goes beyond donating food and falls into the realm of social justice and changes in societal values. Thus the "community development" model that Winnipeg

Harvest has adopted can be viewed as a “*movement* rather than a strict economic model” (Blakely, 1994:43). This can be a movement toward empowering groups and individuals, not just economically, but socially and politically.

It is the Co-ordinator’s belief that:

neighbours, the neighbourhood, that can be strong enough to share food with each other, then the next step is significantly easier. Political action, mutual support, and mutual dependencies and all the good things that happen in community. It is easier to do it there [at the neighbourhood level] than it is in a large scale.

It is easier in a sense that this model of food distribution fulfills the function of distributing food at local area front-line food banks so that people who need food from food banks can access the food bank in their own neighbourhood, or at least as close to their home as possible. This prevents people from having to travel great distances just to pick up a small supply of food. But the community model also addresses certain problems in Canadian society: it is focusing on the needs of the poor rather just doling out food and ignoring the issues of poverty and hunger (and their underlying causes) and it promotes a pro-active grass-roots bottom up approach. Because the alternative way, a top-down trickle-down approach only leaves people with “trickle.” And the dominant economic model of “trickle-down economics,” with its harshness on many of Canada’s social programs (ie. welfare), has repeatedly shown in the past that all that is left for the poor are crumbs.

SUMMARY

This chapter has dealt with the role of Winnipeg Harvest, the main-line food bank in Winnipeg. This organization functions as the main warehouse that collects,

stores, and redistributes food to its member agencies. Furthermore, the main-line food bank plays a co-ordinating role, keeping track of all the meal programs, soup kitchens, and front-line food banks and the people that frequent these organizations. Since there are many smaller front-line food banks and meal programs, Winnipeg Harvest has also taken on a “liaison” role between themselves (and on behalf of many of their member agencies) and large businesses. They are also “public spokespeople” in the media by keeping the general public aware about the issues of poverty and hunger in the city of Winnipeg. The next chapter will deal with how front-line food banks, specifically religiously run food banks, play a role in the distribution of food.

CHAPTER 4

FRONT LINE FOOD BANKS: FOOD FOR THE BODY, FOOD FOR THE SOUL

Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God. Matthew 4:4

The front-line food bank, be it church or community run, is the point of distribution of free food to people who have asked for it. It is the last stage of a relatively lengthy process of getting food from the donors to the recipients. All the efforts of the people and organizations involved (volunteers, workers, organizers, businesses, and Winnipeg Harvest) culminate at this final point. The flow of donated food finally reaches the tables or hampers set up at the front-line food banks while the flow of people end up at the front-line food banks to pick up their food. A food bank client's only necessary requirement for the food is to have their name on the list of the food bank they will be visiting. Even the occasional unregistered "walk-in" is not turned away, but asked to wait until all the registered clients have been served and any leftover or extra food is assembled into an emergency hamper for the recipient. There is no exchange of monies or goods. The food from the food bank has thus become one of the purest forms of "*the gift*" in Canadian society where there is no obligation to reciprocate any form of compensation to the donors.

The front-line food banks are run by various organizations. Some are run by religious organizations. The two Christian Church run food banks that I spent time at, one Mennonite the other Baptist, attempted to respond to the "secular" problems of poverty and hunger from a "spiritual" Christian perspective. Church run food banks do more than just give out food; from their standpoint, they offer food not only for the body,

but food for the soul. They attempt to meet the physical needs of their food bank clients by providing them with food and at the same time they offer their clients spiritual support through the word of God and Jesus as it is written in the Christian Bible.

The running of a church run food bank is based on the concept of Ministry that goes beyond welfare and charity. Church run food banks have become an extension of welfare and “welfare is clearly a major element in helping relationships in our nation,” as Rendle (1984:464) states. But welfare is nonetheless an:

institutionalized stance that many community agencies and helping groups take toward poor people in our society. It is backed by local, state and federal financial support and a bureaucratic organization (Rendle, 1984:363).

Welfare is characterized by the question of eligibility, in other words, “who deserves to be helped?” (Rendle, 1984:464). Sometimes people are not eligible for welfare and help often times has to come from of charity. Yet, the aid provided by the church run food bank is a much deeper commitment than “charity” because, as Rendle (1984:466) claims, charity’s “sole foundation seems to be the personal (not institutional or national) assumption, ‘I am so much better than you, I will help you, even though you don’t deserve it.’” Charity can be seen at times as an event or gesture that may have a personal meaning to the individual or group performing the act of charity. However, to the church run food bank charity without the “Grace of God” to provide a religious or faith meaning to the actions of charity lacks spiritual depth. Thus the philosophical basis of a church run food bank is through Ministry, which is the servicing of a person’s spirituality through a Christian god and through actions that have the intention to enhance the spirituality of others (Engle, 1998) along with enhancing their physical, psychological, and emotional necessities. Hence, “Ministry is the effort to grow past, to evolve beyond,

the limitations of welfare and the indifference of charity...[and to] discover that in seeking to help others who become our guests, we paradoxically experience God's grace in our own lives" (Rendle, 1984:467).

The Ministry of a church run front line food bank is thus broken down into a dichotomy of "faith" and "works" that are not mutually exclusive from one another, but intertwined. The church members running food banks see them as one way of "helping the poor" and as their Christian duty. The motivation to help the poor that many of these people have is well supported in the Christian Bible. The "faith" the church volunteers have in their religion and their God is their motivation to perform their "works" of charity. The often quoted verse of Matthew 4:4, "*Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God,*" is used in many Christian churches to emphasize that the acceptance and belief in God and Jesus are more important than the possession of goods. However, the Bible also emphasizes the demonstrations of one's faith in good deeds since, as it is said in James 2:14-17, "*What use is it, my brethren, if a man says he has faith, but he has no works?....Even so faith, if it has no works, is dead, being by itself.*" My own observations and discussions with people affiliated with the churches (ie. pastors, church elders), suggest that these two biblical verses can be seen as setting the spiritual and practical reasons why churches run front line food banks.

However, the volunteers, organizers, pastors, and church lay people are not blind to the socio-economic problems that have lead to the need for food banks. These people who provided help thought that "charity" was more than just a "hand-out" and that there was more meaning to their work than just setting up an alternative food supplement

distribution point. The Mennonite Outreach Pastor of one of the front line food banks, whose work as co-ordinator of the food bank (along with his other many duties), claimed that the church run food bank was more than a secular charity, by stating in an interview with me (all quotes from the Mennonite and Baptist Pastors, Winnipeg Harvest Co-ordinator, and Executive Director from Toronto are from interviews conducted with me) that the purpose of his church and food bank are:

As a church, our mission and vision statement is equipping God's people and extending God's kingdom. In regards to [the food bank] our desire is to extend help [ie. food] and healing [support] in the name of Jesus Christ to [this neighbourhood] area of Winnipeg.

The front-line food bank is a place that deals with the day-to-day realities of poverty and hunger but it is nonetheless a reaction to the greater social, political, and economic problems that have lead to the rise in the number of and usage of food banks. As Martens (1994:22) states in his work about the food bank he helped establish, "the goals and objectives of Harvest Ministry do not address "the top of the bank," but they do minister to 'the bottom of the ghetto.'" A front-line food bank functions as a method to alleviate the immediate and short-term shortages due to poverty. At the same time the front line food bank has become a place where the spiritual beliefs of those who run them and volunteer in them of are put into practice. The food bank clients who frequent the front line food banks have the opportunity not only to pick up food but also to develop new social/support networks, have a safe place to sit and chat with others over coffee, and seek out the spiritual, social, and emotional support that can be offered by these organizations.

THE FRONT LINE FOOD BANK

My fieldwork at the front line food bank was probably my most rewarding experience. This is not to say my time spent at Winnipeg Harvest was not enjoyable. Because my first exposure to food banks was at Winnipeg Harvest, I was completely unaware of what to expect and at the same time somewhat overwhelmed by the experience of working in an environment that dealt specifically with poverty and hunger. Most of my time at Winnipeg Harvest was a time of absorbing as much information as possible, volunteering my time by helping out, and learning about food banks. I made some valuable contacts and some good acquaintance-friendships at Winnipeg Harvest. However, it was at the smaller more intimate front line food banks, the Mennonite run food bank and to a lesser extent the Baptist run food bank, that I formed very strong friendships. These friendships enabled me to gain the trust of many of the volunteers and food bank clients. This allowed me to delve deeper into the lives of these people and gain a better understanding of these people and their need to frequent a food bank.

It was at the Mennonite run food bank that I felt most comfortable and was able to freely associate with the food bank clients and volunteers. Unlike the Baptist run food bank, which was run primarily by retired congregation members (they were not food bank clients at the time of my fieldwork), the Mennonite food bank was composed of a mix of volunteers spanning different ages and various social, economic, and ethnic backgrounds. The volunteers at the Mennonite food bank were not only retired, semi-retired, and employed congregation members or members of other Mennonite churches, but also food bank clients not of the Mennonite faith. Although both food banks were very friendly and open to all persons, there seemed to be a distancing between the

volunteers and the clients at the Baptist food bank that I did not observe at the Mennonite food bank. The fact that some of the volunteers at the Mennonite food bank were themselves clients helped bridge the gap between the non-client volunteers and the food bank clients.

Martens (1994:14-16) addresses the issue of the distancing effect between his Mennonite Church congregation and the food bank clients while developing the Harvest Ministry food bank. He found that there were four barriers to change in redefining the mission of the church, which extends to the ministry of the food bank: 1) Sub-Cultural Identification; 2) Practice of Separation; 3) Work Ethic; and 4) Prejudice.

Sub-Cultural Identification is the:

sub-cultural entity [that] a large number of Mennonites identify themselves not only by faith, but ethnically as well...Unfortunately, a sub-cultural identity will often impede any outreach ministry because many are afraid to extend themselves beyond the expression of their group" (Martens, 1994:14).

The Practice of Separation, Martens (1994:15) claims, is "rooted in the Anabaptist tradition...[and that the] "separation" mind-set makes it difficult for some within our church to minister effectively within a culture that they perceive to be a carrier of sin."

The Work Ethic barrier deals with the:

element of pride attributed to a strong vibrant work ethic, ie.: "If you don't work you don't eat," "You get what you deserve." It is therefore not difficult to see why this perspective on life would make it difficult for many in the church to minister to the destitute, especially those on social assistance who have little or no desire [or opportunity] to work (Martens, 1994:14-15).

Finally there was the Prejudice barrier. Because Martens' church food bank deals with culturally and ethnically diverse people, they had to "acknowledge and break the

existing personal prejudices...and to realize [that] before God all are created equal" (Martens, 1994:16). At an organizational level, Martens and his congregation were willing to acknowledge their limitations and work towards breaking down the barriers between "the Church" and "the People." This was quite evident at the Mennonite Church food bank I spent time at. Granted there were differences between the food bank clients, the volunteer food bank clients, and the non-food bank client volunteers, but a regular day at the food bank was not about "us" and "them," but about working together and being together. Interactions at the Mennonite food bank were quite free and open without any rigid demarcations between the clients and volunteers.

Considering my age and where I was personally coming from (student, underemployed, trying to make ends meet), from my own observations the relatively "younger" clients/volunteers of the Mennonite food bank had more in common with me than the older volunteers and food bank clients of the Baptist food bank. Furthermore, the Mennonite food bank is located in Osborne Village, a part of Winnipeg where there tends to be a mix of ages and socio-economic groups (I also lived in the area and had a shared sense of place with some of these people).

Both the Mennonite and Baptist food banks serve clients primarily in their immediate geographic locations. According to the Baptist Senior Pastor and the Mennonite Outreach Pastor the community approach to food banking is preferred. As the Baptist Pastor states:

I think from the perspective that it [community based food banking] allows us to, especially the way we run our food bank with the coffee and goodies and fellowship time beforehand, it allows for some relationship building, which is important because we're wanting to be more than just a food distribution place. We want to try to meet other needs; emotional, spiritual needs and you can't do

that if all you're doing is kind of warehousing people, you know like this is the place, come get your food and be gone. And I think it also gives some ownership for us as a church. It gives some ownership; you know these are people in our neighbourhood and we're part of the neighbourhood. And I think that's really what we're striving as a church to portray, is that we are here to be a part of the community.

Not only do the food bank clients benefit by having a food bank reasonably close, but the churches that run them benefit as well. The food bank at the Mennonite Church, according to the Mennonite Outreach Pastor:

has opened up many doors for us to be involved in our community...it has allowed us to become involved in our community. To impact people's lives around here, to be able to help them out. We've had opportunities to move people, to get furniture for people, all because we enter their lives and know who they are and how we can meet their needs. And I think along with that is having our church realizing that they're around us and having people begin to be involved in the community around us and see that they have a role to play in impacting people's lives around us.

In one sense, the barriers that Martens discusses are ultimately eroded not just by a change of values and attitudes, but also by actually becoming involved in the lives of the people inside and out of the church.

Furthermore, the food bank can be seen as a safe place as the Baptist Pastor claims; there they "have a safe place...Even if it is only for that brief time when the food bank is open." The front line food banks, even though those I visited were church basements converted into makeshift distribution outlets, were places people were able to sit down, have a cup of coffee, a small snack, and maybe a cigarette outside and chat with friends, acquaintances, or strangers. I met some very nice people who made the trek, sometimes weekly even though they may not have been receiving food that week. Sometimes the weather was bad, but they still made it for their appointed time, or stood outside waiting in line in the cold Winnipeg weather to get their allotted amount of food.

Living in poverty is hard. Whoever said the poor are lazy, never had to run the obstacle course they have to. Not only do some food bank clients have to deal with a punitive social welfare system which has failed them, hence the need for food banks; they have to be registered with the food bank, get there on time, get in line, be given food that they have no real choice over ("you get what you get" as one food bank client told me), and then go on with their day. Having to be at a food bank means time taken away, and my interpretation would be that possibly a half day is wasted getting to the food bank, waiting for their food, and getting back home. And who knows at what cost, not just in time, but also financially (ie. bus fare, missed employment opportunities, etc.). Although food banks are a necessity and have contributed greatly to the "spirit of community and giving" they are nonetheless organizations that should not need to exist in the relatively rich Canadian society.

A DAY AT THE FOOD BANK

The Mennonite Church run food bank begins every Thursday morning (except the last Thursday of the month) at around 9:30 a.m., when some of the volunteers and the Outreach Pastor arrive. Tables and chairs are already set up in one part of the basement that will eventually be converted into the food bank. Coffee and cookies are available, people mingle and greet each other and settle down to the tables.

Once everyone has settled the Outreach Pastor begins the day with the devotional (a time devoted to thinking, talking, praying, and discussing matters of faith) starting with a prayer and a sermon. Sometimes a guest (a visiting pastor) or one of the volunteers was invited to begin the morning sermon. The sermons varied, but often dealt

with secular everyday problems and how they could be related to the teachings of Christ as they are written in the Gospels and possibly solved through them. There was also singing, a praise for a volunteer of the month, or wishing someone a happy birthday.

The end of this devotional time was a quiet prayer time that lasted a few minutes, where everyone bowed his or her heads in silent prayer and listened to anyone who decided to pray out loud. Often this silent prayer time began with someone who volunteered to begin by praying out loud. Then there would be silence and someone else would pray out loud. It was almost like a form of open confession where people had a chance to express what they were feeling and sometimes asking others to pray for them in their time of need or for a sick relative, etc. The Outreach Pastor seemed to moderate this time and was the one who judged when the time was right to end the devotional, making sure everyone had their chance to speak up if they so chose. The Pastor ended this time with a short prayer by summing up the concerns that were brought forth during the devotional and the silent prayer time and asking Jesus and God for strength and guidance for all.

10:00 a.m. through to 11:00 a.m. was time to set up the basement into a food bank. Tables were set up, more coffee was made, the lunch was prepared, in-house supplies of food were set up on the tables, some people drank coffee, talked, smoked cigarettes outside, and waited for the truck from Winnipeg Harvest to arrive. Around 11:00 a.m. the Harvest truck arrived at the backdoor of the church leading to the basement. It was a beehive of activity getting the food from the truck, into the basement, and sorted into the different categories of food onto the tables. From what I could tell,

the food looked good. A lot of dry/canned goods, fresh milk, vegetables (when in season), cereals, and bread that was close to or just past the expiry dates.

Once the food was sorted out onto the tables it was close to lunchtime. By now more volunteers had filtered in and were lending a hand where needed or asked for. Before the noontime meal was served to the volunteers and food bank client volunteers there was another devotional (ie. prayer meeting). After grace was said the people lined up for their serving of soup or sandwiches, and coffee and sweet treats. The people sat at the tables, ate, talked, and had conversations spanning topics from religion to the hockey scores.

After lunch was down time for most people. While some volunteers helped clear the tables and clean the dishes, the food bank clients who were also volunteers took this time to pick up their own groceries. Although they were not given any special treatment such as getting more food than they were allowed, they had the opportunity to get "first pick" of some of the more choice items; for example getting a can of beef stew rather than tomato soup. This may not seem like a lot to those who have the income to buy whatever they please, but to those who rely on the food banks sometimes, this ability to choose one relatively better item over another is a relished luxury.

At 1:00 pm there was another religious service held in one of the seminar rooms or the chapel itself for those who felt inclined to attend. At no time was anyone ever forced to attend any prayer groups or even sit in during the devotional in the morning. Because of the system the Mennonite Church had set up for designating specific times for people to show up for their pick up of food there was no prayer before the food was given out. Thus it was possible for any food bank client to avoid any or all religious activities

at the Mennonite food bank. Although there was always some form of exposure to the beliefs of the people who were running the food bank, such as free literature of small mass produced prayer books, children's Sunday School paintings on the wall, or flyers inviting anyone to one church function or another.

At the Baptist Church the Senior Pastor gave a small prayer, usually, before the food was distributed. My interpretation of events at the church run food banks, confirmed by statements from the church pastor during interviews, is that no one was ever obligated. No one was ever obliged to sit through it, though most did, because they wanted to, or out of respect to the people praying, or not wanting to make an effort to leave the room. The only place I knew of that required people to sit through a sermon before they received any food was at a soup kitchen on "skid row." Because this was a private organization they could set up any rules that they wanted (within reason of course). This is not to say this group is ill spirited, but they work within their own belief system and stand by their convictions. In one sense this organization is first and foremost a place of worship and not a secular restaurant. Though this soup kitchen is serving a function of providing hot meals to the homeless, it also could be seen as taking advantage of a trapped population who have no other choice but to sit through a sermon before receiving their food.

The 1:00 p.m. religious service at the Mennonite church was a much more in-depth and intimate service especially when it was held in the Chapel or in the seminar room. It was a time to go and discuss practically anything that was on one's mind. And support was not limited to just prayer groups and meetings. At any time a person can go and talk one on one to any available Pastor or church "elder" for guidance or advice.

One seminar room devotional stands out in my mind and is one that I will not forget. A young single father who I befriended had asked the group to pray for him. One of the older volunteers suggested a “laying of hands” prayer. About three people stood around him, placed their hands on his shoulders, with their heads bowed down, and began to pray for him. It was a simple prayer asking to give him strength to overcome his hardships. This young man never struck me as an overly religious person, but he did volunteer regularly, sat in during the morning devotional, and did make use of the social support offered not only by the food bank, but the Mennonite Church itself. He experienced, as I did, a sense of belonging to this organization and the people around him in a place that was more than just a food bank, even if it operated only for one day each week. The fact that these “elderly” volunteers took the time and effort to stand around him and pray for him must have, at least according to my interpretation, induced a powerful feeling of support, especially when I knew that he had his own family difficulties to deal with.

For some people the food bank was their “Sunday at Church,” although it was on a Thursday. As the Outreach Pastor told me, the essence of what was going on at the food bank was more than just giving out food, but that:

we all need community and we’re all made to be involved in relationships. God created us that way. I believe a big part of them [the food bank clients] if they come to know Jesus, then it seems to make sense to become a part of the church because to worship in a group, to worship in community, and to be able to establish those relationships...For some of them that happens on Thursday and they’re as much a part of our church in the sense that they’re here on Thursday. If they’re not here on Sunday, they’re receiving the same stuff on Thursday.

As the Outreach Pastor explained the food bank is but one aspect of his faith and his church’s belief system and that the church activities and beliefs do not begin and end on

Sunday, but occur constantly and are never ending. And if the only chance that some people have to be closer to God and Jesus and other people happens to occur on a Thursday in a food bank in a church basement, then so be it. Hence, the important aspect of the food bank from this church's point of view, other than giving out food, is to build relationships with strangers and friends through Jesus and God.

At 1:30 p.m. the food distribution begins. Clients who are regulars at the Mennonite food bank call the day before to the church and have their names added to the food bank client list. Once all the calls are taken, one of the food bank volunteers phones Winnipeg Harvest and tells them how many people they will be expecting on Thursday and the number of people that person will be picking food up for. Most other food banks have the clients phone Winnipeg Harvest directly and Winnipeg Harvest takes care of the logistics of assembling client lists for the food bank.

The Mennonite food bank has taken it upon themselves to deal with the registering of their own clients. This to them is more efficient and allows a personal contact with the clients who phone the church. Although the Mennonite food bank designates set times when its clients will attend the food bank, it is a first phone in first come basis. The later you phone, the later the client's time slot is. Calling earlier can mean choosing a time more convenient for the food bank client or getting to the food bank earlier for a supposedly better pick of food. A later time slot usually leads to slimmer pickings on the better quality or preferred foods, although picking food is very limited and there is very little choice of foods compared to supermarket shopping. The time slot system also prevents people from lining up and waiting. The Baptist food bank runs a system of first in first up. People who line up early are given a lower number as

they enter the building when the doors open and wait at the coffee tables set up for their range of numbers to be called. As people approach the registration table in either food bank, all they are asked for is their name and possibly their health card for identification.

Then the client moves down the various tables and is allotted his or her quantity of food depending on how many people are in their family/household unit. Single people get less food. People with children tend to get more food, especially some of the fresh items like milk. At the Mennonite food bank people enter the building from the front down to the basement, past the food, and right to the coffee tables that are set up. Some people sit, talk, have a snack, or just leave through the exit in the back. And this process continues for about two hours. People coming and going, some hanging around for the duration of the food bank hours.

Eventually, around 3:30 p.m., the last of the food bank clients is served and any "walk-ins" are taken care of. Clean up of the basement occurs and slowly people filter out and go on with their day, ready to do it all over again the next time around.

CONFLICTING VIEWS ON THE ROLE OF RELIGIOUS RUN FRONT LINE FOOD BANKS

The religious community and other community and advocate groups in Canada have taken it upon themselves to compensate for government policies and a welfare system that has failed many people. In the case of food banks, food is often provided to those on social assistance and even to those people who could be considered the "working poor." As Frances Russell of the *Winnipeg Free Press* (1996:A14) states:

The transfer of social functions from government to private charities, no matter how well-meaning, means a shift from rights of citizenship to privileges of

mendicants, a state of affairs social reformers have been trying to eliminate for nearly 150 years. [Russell goes on to quote Dr. Susan Phillips who states] "the voluntary sector in Canada simply does not have the requisite infrastructure to operate everywhere that the state has vacated. It is also a myth to assume that corporate or private donations can readily substitute for government funding."

A business/corporation by definition is out to make a profit. If it is not profitable (ie. financially or image wise) to donate food or funds to charities such as food banks then a simple cost/benefit analysis could slow down or cut off any more resources to these organizations. Businesses do not have the same type of accountability as democratically elected governments do. Nonetheless, the shift to voluntary organizations has occurred over the last twenty years, as shown of the increasing number of food banks and of people using them. "Community spirit" and people getting together at their local food bank aside, food banks are a symbol of major political, social, and economic problems in Canada.

The role of religious organizations in food banking is complex. The Winnipeg Harvest Co-Ordinator and the Executive Director of the Toronto Daily Bread Food Bank see this issue from opposite perspectives. The Co-Ordinator in Winnipeg states that the faith community is:

Critical, absolutely critical. In Freire's book *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, he talks about the six power points. And only one of the power points is financial. The other major one that he talks about again and again and again, is the spiritual power. That's one that's not articulated well...it's one that, when used appropriately back in the 30's and 40's and 50's; our parents and grandparents and even great grandparents, who came from the faith communities, came the Canada Assistance Plan that Canada has been praised for around the world. And we've now lost that. That came from people of faith. They said they want a society that's better for all of us, pensions and all that kind of stuff. So, it's time for the faith communities to learn how to get back into the dialogue and into the fight. If we wait to have justice legislated, then it trickles down. So all they see is a trickle. We can't wait for that. We need the faith community that has an ethical statement that says all citizens should be "love one another, all citizens

should be treated equitably, or have the option or access to equitable treatment, and that kind of stuff. So the faith communities are critical.

Though no one can really dispute the positive "feel good" attitude the Co-ordinator has about the role of strong faith values, one may nonetheless question the Co-ordinator's assumption that people's attitudes and faith in religion alone are necessarily going to change political-economic patterns. Unfortunately, in Canada, the election of political parties with obvious neo-liberal philosophies over the last twenty years has lead to fiscally conservative budgets focused on cutbacks rather than supporting social programs.

However, one must also consider that Winnipeg Harvest is located in a city where grass-roots community activism is very high, and with a strong history of socially left leaning attitudes. Events such as the Winnipeg General Strike in the early part of the twentieth century and early prairie social activists such as "Tommy" Douglas are a part of the social and historical consciousness of Winnipeg and helped lay the foundation for left leaning philosophies for many groups in Manitoba and Canada. Current organizations such Choices and the Mennonite Central Committee are both based in Winnipeg and are heavily involved in social justice issues. Thus, the views of the Co-ordinator of Winnipeg Harvest reflect a local political reality.

On the contrary, the Executive Director in Toronto seems to take a less enthusiastic approach to the role of religious organizations involved in food banking.

The Executive Director claims:

I think one of the really frustrating things is that churches are so involved in food banking across the country, but have failed on the social justice front, and failed to speak up loud enough, and failed to witness to what's happening in their own organizations. I think it's too bad and I think it grows out of their, somehow, fear that some of the parishioners are going to get pissed off because they don't agree with them politically.

Whether it is for political or “comfort” reasons not all churches necessarily believe in food for the body and the following case completely supports the Executive Director’s feelings. Though it may have been an isolated case, Gillespie of the *Winnipeg Free Press* (2000: A1) reported that a Winnipeg church run food bank closed down because, as its Unity Truth Centre Minister claims in the article, “It’s attracting a lot of street people that made it uncomfortable for people...[and] Most clients of food banks have not yet come to a sense of personal responsibility in life. They are in denial, blame or seeing the world as owing them.” These claims are defeatist, patronizing, and blame the victim. However, they cannot be ignored because there are many who agree with the Minister’s statements. My view is that, although individual responsibility is important for all people, limited choices in terms of employment, underemployment, unemployment, physical and mental problems, living on fixed incomes, and so on should be factored in before such sweeping generalizations can be made about food bank clients.

The critique by the Toronto Executive Director seems to be justified by the closing down of a church run food bank in Winnipeg because it made some people “uncomfortable.” She was also wary of how some of the front line food banks distribute food, using the term “Rice Christians.” When I asked what that meant, she replied, “You’ve never heard that term? That’s because you’re too young. Well it was the idea of missionaries going to third world countries coning people in with rice.” Furthermore the Executive Director felt that if the running of a food bank was an extension of a church’s religious practice then “[they] ought to be working for a more just society. And if they don’t see that connection they should go back and read their bibles!”

It is necessary to understand the motivations behind church run food banks and their philosophies on why and how they distribute food because their actions affect each and every food bank client in one form or another. Yet, the major concern is still the fact that many non-profit organizations, such as churches, have become stop-gap measures and have taken on greater social responsibilities that were once the responsibilities of the state. Thus, a shift has occurred from collective rights to individual responsibilities at a time when it is harder for individuals to deal with major socio-economic problems on their own. Inflation means lower real wages, and it is not longer possible, as it was thirty or forty years ago for one full-time employed person to provide for an entire family.

It is difficult to speculate on how effective church voices are in solving social justice issues. For such immediate problems as providing food at their food banks, the two food banks in this study are prime examples of churches playing a competent if not excellent role. Actually doing something beyond giving out food, such as becoming politically motivated in the role of "poverty advocate" is not perceived as part of their primary mandate. Thus, the front line food banks will continue to be just that, places that provide supplemental food from their "faith" based position and poverty advocacy will be pursued at higher political levels by organizations such as Winnipeg Harvest or Choices concerned with social justice issues.

SUMMARY

This chapter has dealt specifically with the role of religiously run front-line food banks and how they function on a day to day basis. The philosophical foundation of the church run front-line food bank is not just from charity and welfare, but from the

perspective of ministry: the servicing of a person's spirituality through a Christian god and through actions that have the intention to enhance the spirituality of others (Engle, 1998). Although the front-line food bank does play a vital role in distributing food in the neighbourhoods they are set in, there still are conflicting views on the motivation behind some church run food banks and the whole concept of "food for the body, food for the soul." The next chapter is the results of the survey conducted for this study. A basic profile of food bank clients that attended the two front-line food banks where this study was conducted have been compiled from the data of the survey.

CHAPTER 5

THE SURVEY: A PROFILE OF FOOD BANK CLIENTS

Two questions often asked about food banks are: 1) Who are the people who use them? and 2) Why? Often each individual food bank client will have her or his own explanation or reason as to why they need to use a food bank. Although individual "stories" of food bank clients are important when elucidating the problem of food bank usage, it is equally important to determine if there are any general trends (ie. demographics, income levels, etc.) amongst food bank clients. The collection of statistics in the study of food banks and their clients is necessary to draw some conclusions as to what factors may lead people to use these organizations. Thus the accumulation of data by a survey method is a way to develop a profile of food bank clients. Furthermore, the use of other studies, such as the Canadian Association of Food Banks' annual survey of food bank usage across Canada, *HungerCount 1999: A Growing Hunger for Change* (September 1999), Winnipeg Harvest's *Hunger Barometer* (Spring 1998), and Sloan and Stewart's study *Shelter Affordability and Housing Needs: A Study of Winnipeg Food Bank Users* (December 1997), are valuable sources of information that can be used for comparative purposes. These studies come to similar conclusions about food bank usage in Canada and will be used throughout this chapter to evaluate if the data collected for the survey in this study are consistent with their results.

General Statistics of Food Bank Clients

HungerCount 1999 (September 1999) is a nation wide survey that looks at the general usage of food banks across Canada. The data presented deals with the number of food banks in Canada, 698 (does not include front-line agencies); sources of income of the clients (68.1% are on social assistance); the total number of people who use food banks in a year in Canada (790 344 people in the month of March, this is 2.6% of the Canadian population); and food bank usage by province in absolute numbers and as a percentage of the population. Ontario and Quebec had the highest absolute number of food bank clients, 290,139 and 244,043 people respectively during March 1999, primarily because these are the largest provinces, while Newfoundland had the highest rate of use at 6.6% due its long history of a depressed economy. Manitoba assisted 34,193 people in the month of March 1999 and had a rate of use of approximately 3% of the population.

The survey conducted for the present study was an attempt to gain as much information as possible about food bank clients. Specific questions on the survey ranged from basic demographics (sex, age, marital status, dependent children), education and housing, sources of income, and food bank usage.

General Demographics: Sex, Age, Marital Status, & Dependents

Of the 52 food bank clients surveyed 36 were male (69.23%) and 16 were female (30.77%) (Table 7).

Table 7. Gender.

Gender	N	%
Male	36	69.23
Female	16	30.77
Total:	52	100.00

The age of the food bank clients were highly concentrated in the middle years of 31 to 50 for both sexes (63.45% of the total surveyed, see Table 8) with 66.66 % of the male population in this age range and 56.25% of the female population in this age range.

Table 8. Age of clients by gender.

Age	Male		Female		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
15 to 20	2	5.56	0	0.00	2	3.85
21 to 25	2	5.56	0	0.00	2	3.85
26 to 30	2	5.56	2	12.50	4	7.69
31 to 35	8	22.22	3	18.75	11	21.15
36 to 40	8	22.22	3	18.75	11	21.15
41 to 50	8	22.22	3	18.75	11	21.15
50+	6	16.67	3	18.75	9	17.31
Senior Citizens	0	0.00	2	12.50	2	3.85
Total:	36	100.00	16	100.00	52	100.00

This demographic distribution is consistent with Sloan and Stewart's (1997:46) findings that "over 50 percent of respondents were in the 25 to 44 age group." Furthermore, according to Sloan and Stewart (1997:46):

When comparing the age distribution of the food bank users with the age distribution for the city of Winnipeg, it becomes apparent that food bank users are over represented in the middle age groups and under represented in the young and old age groups.

Almost half of the total food bank clients surveyed were single, 25 out of 52 (48.08%, see Table 8). This result is slightly higher than Winnipeg Harvest's (Spring 1998:2) survey and Sloan and Stewart's (1997:47) survey, where both studies found only 40% of their respondents were single. In this study the majority of those surveyed were single males (18 of 36 males), then males in a common-law relationship (8 of 36), then single females (7 of 16 females) (see Table 9).

Table 9. Marital Status of clients by gender.

Marital Status	Male		Female		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Married	3	8.33	4	25.00	7	13.46
Common-Law	8	22.22	0	0.00	8	15.38
Single	18	50.00	7	43.75	25	48.08
In a relationship	1	2.78	0	0.00	1	1.92
Separated	2	5.56	1	6.25	3	5.77
Divorced	4	11.11	4	25.00	8	15.38
Widowed	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00
Total:	36	100.00	16	100.00	52	100.00

Table 10 shows that the majority of males (28 of 36) had no dependent children, while almost half the women (7 of 16) had children. Of the men 5 of them each had 1 dependent child and only 3 of them had 2 dependent children each. Of the women, 5 out of 16 had 2 dependent children each. An interesting note is that of all the women who had children, 7 out of 9 were single, separated, or divorced, and all had more than 2 children. Only 3 out of the 8 men with children were single or separated. Although this is a very small sample, size the larger number of single women with children who use food banks is consistent with the claims made that single women with children are more likely to use food banks (Philp, 2000:A5).

Table 10. Number of Dependent Children per Client by Gender and Marital Status.

Gender and Marital Status	Number of Dependent Children under 18						Total
	0	1	2	3	4	5	
Male:							
Married	0	1	2	0	0	0	3
Common-Law	7	1	0	0	0	0	8
Single	16	1	1	0	0	0	18
In a relationship	0	1	0	0	0	0	1
Separated	1	1	0	0	0	0	2
Divorced	4	0	0	0	0	0	4
Subtotal:	28	5	3	0	0	0	36
Female:							
Married	2	0	0	1	1	0	4
Common-Law	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Single	2	0	4	1	0	0	7
In a relationship	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Separated	0	0	0	0	0	1	1
Divorced	3	0	1	0	0	0	4
Subtotal:	7	0	5	2	1	1	16
Total:	35	5	8	2	1	1	52

Furthermore, the figures in Table 10 show us that there are a total of 36 children under the age of 18 who are most likely dependent on food banks via their caregivers (this figure is derived by multiplying the subtotal of each individual column and multiplying it by the number of children in each respective column). When a person goes to a food bank the food may not necessarily be just for themselves but also for their dependents, depending on how many people they claim are in their household at the time of registration when calling Winnipeg Harvest's referral system. Food at food banks is rationed according to the number of people in a household, so a single person receives

less food than a person claiming to have 2 or 3 dependent children (or children in their household. On top of the 52 people who were surveyed there are another 36 people under the age of 18 who are most likely receiving food from the food bank (equal to the total of males surveyed), although they themselves may not be lining up at the food bank. These children are probably the most vulnerable people in Canadian society, not only because they do not have income security as many adults do (due to age, lack of education or still in school, work inexperience, limited job opportunities, etc.) but also because they require an appropriate amount of nutritious food on a consistent basis that is essential to the development of children.

As *HungerCount 1999* (September 1999:5) claims, “children are consistently over-represented in food bank lines...40.8% of food bank recipients were under the age of 18. In comparison children make up just over one-quarter of the population [of Canada].” In this study, if the children are factored into the actual number of people who were surveyed, propping up the total to 88 people making use of a food bank (either by attending them or receiving food by proxy via their caregivers), the children end up representing 40.90% of those surveyed. This is almost equal to the national results of the *HungerCount 1999* figures.

Education & Housing

“One of the most common barriers to finding work is lack of education” (Winnipeg Harvest, Spring 1998:4). Table 11 shows us that half of the entire sample size did not finish high school, while only 11 of the respondents finished high school, while only 5 received their GED (high school equivalency).

Table 11. Level of Education by Gender.

Level of Education	Male		Female		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Up to Grade 8	2	5.56	2	12.50	4	7.69
Some High School	15	41.67	7	43.75	22	42.31
Graduated High School	8	22.22	3	18.75	11	21.15
Some College	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00
Graduated College	1	2.78	0	0.00	1	1.92
Some University	3	8.33	0	0.00	3	5.77
Graduated University	2	5.56	3	18.75	5	9.62
GED	4	11.11	1	6.25	5	9.62
Other	1	2.78	0	0.00	1	1.92
Total:	36	100.00	16	100.00	52	100.00

That means only 80.77% of the food bank clients had no more than a high school education that can translate into limited opportunities in the work force. Winnipeg Harvest's (Spring 1998:4) results show that 65% of their respondents had not finished high school and that 27% of them felt "their poor education is one of the main reasons they are unable to secure employment." Sloan and Stewart (1997:47) claim, "over 60 percent did not have a high school education."

"A university or college degree is no guarantee one will never depend on a food bank for help" (Winnipeg Harvest, Spring 1998:4). There were those who attended food banks who had some form of post-secondary education, with 5 of the 52 respondents having completed university (ie. BA) and 4 others with some form of post-secondary education attendance (see Table 11). This means that 17.31% of the sample had higher education than high school. Winnipeg Harvest's (Spring 1998:4) results are similar with 19% of their respondents having attended university or college and 8% having a college

or university degree, while in Sloan and Stewart (1997:47) "15 percent had completed or had some post-secondary education".

Table 12 indicates where the food bank clients live in the city of Winnipeg and the type of housing they reside in.

Table 12. Food Bank Client Housing by City District.

Housing	Fort Rouge	St. James	West End	North West	West Kildonan	Downtown	Total
Own house/condo	0	0	1	0	1	0	2
Rent a house	2	1	4	0	0	0	7
Rent an apartment	19	0	9	1	0	1	30
Rent a room in a house	3	0	4	0	0	0	7
Share house with roommate	0	0	0	1	0	0	1
Share apartment with roommate	1	0	4	0	0	0	5
Total:	25	1	22	3	1	1	52

Since the surveys were conducted at two separate front-line food banks, one in the Fort Rouge area the other in the West End area, the majority of the respondents tended to reside in those areas. This is due to the community/neighbourhood model of food banking so that people can access a food bank close to where they live rather than having to travel, possibly great distances and at great inconveniences, to one central location. Explanations vary as to why those who lived in other areas of the city attended a food bank outside their district. Because Winnipeg Harvest often determines where a food bank client goes to receive food, according to the client's geographic locations, situations arise where the referral system has to send a client to another food bank. For example, a local food bank has reached its capacity to handle clients, a client may have missed the scheduled food bank hours in their area and was given the option to travel to another food bank, the client does not want to attend a local food bank, or the client was in need of emergency supplies and was sent to another food bank that was open.

Table 12 also shows that 50 out of the 52 respondents lived in some sort of rental accommodation. A prevalent theme amongst food bank clients is the issue of housing affordability. According to Sloan and Stewart (1997: 92-93):

it was not a lack of affordable housing in the quantitative sense that was the problem but a lack of adequate family income that made housing affordable using conventional standards. A large majority of food bank users in our study (86%) had a yearly income of under \$12,000. [Furthermore] it is not incomes alone, but housing costs together with incomes, that determine the overall standard of living of most of us.

Hence, the “relationship between the level of income and shelter affordability was a determining factor as to whether or not an individual was forced to seek assistance from the food bank system” (Sloan & Stewart, 1997:26). Because housing (ie. rent) tends to be a fixed expenditure, “once a household occupies a particular dwelling it is hard to alter the amount and type of housing services consumed. The cost of housing is thus the biggest item in most families’ budgets and the hardest to adjust” (Sloan & Stewart, 1997:93).

When the question “Pay the rent or feed the kids?” comes up, it has much meaning.

Recognition of the interaction among incomes, shelter costs, and the cost of non-shelter necessities leads logically to an affordability standard that is a sliding scale, rather than a fixed percentage of income. A household paying more than it can afford on this standard is “shelter-poor,” the squeeze between the income and housing cost leaving it with insufficient resources to meet its non-shelter needs a minimum level of adequacy (Sloan & Stewart, 1997:93).

A person cannot pay half the rent and at best can be late with the rent on the odd occasion (with “penalty” from the landlord). Thus the one expenditure that can be “stretched out” is the food bill. This can be done by a variety of ways depending on one’s budget. For example, purchasing an abundance of cheaper more filling starchy

foods that “fill the belly,” but without proper foods (ie. foods that contain a good balance of proteins, fibre, vitamins, minerals, etc. found in other food sources), may be deficient in providing a balanced diet if this practice is used on a consistent basis.

Sources of Income

If the “relationship between the level of income and shelter affordability [is] a determining factor as to whether or not an individual was forced to seek assistance from the food bank system” (Sloan & Stewart, 1997:26) then the fact that of the 52 food bank clients that divulged information on where they received their income, 46 were on some type of social assistance (see Table 13).

Table 13. Sources of Income for Food Bank Clients.

Source of Social Assistance	N	%	Avg. Assistance (per month)*	Is Assistance enough to live on?		Income supplementing Assistance	
				Yes	No	No. of People	Avg. Wage/mo
Provincial Welfare†	18	34.62	\$797.65	4	14	3	\$322.64
City Welfare	19	36.54	\$342.79	2	17	2	\$350.00
Pension	6	11.54	\$695.50	1	5	1	\$100.00
Employment Insurance	1	1.92	\$1,200.00	0	1	0	n/a
Worker's Compensation	1	1.92	\$660.00	1	0	0	n/a
Social Assistance - Indian Affairs	1	1.92	\$1,061.00	0	1	0	n/a
No response	6	11.54	n/a	n/a	n/a	3	\$482.64
Total:	52	100.00		8	38	9	

† one respondent chose not to divulge average dollar assistance per month.

* some figures may be lower than actual amount due to unavailable rent assistance information (rent forwarded directly to landlord).

That is 88.46% of the sample size. Provincial and City welfare were the predominant forms of income for food bank clients with the average Provincial recipient obtaining \$797.65 while the City recipient averaging only \$342.79. Furthermore, some people supplemented their welfare income with outside sources of income (ie. jobs, family loans, informal economy jobs: “work under the table,” etc.).

There is a difference between Provincial and City welfare other than the obvious fact that Provincial recipients receive more money than City recipients (At the time of this study Provincial and City Welfare were separate agencies, however plans were in effect to amalgamate both programs). Provincial is welfare for those people who: 1) have a mental or physical illness or disability likely to last more than 90 days and keeps them from earning enough money; 2) single parents raising children; 3) people in areas with no municipal government; 4) people staying in women's crisis shelters; 5) people 65 years of age or older; 6) dependent children whose parents are dead or unable to help meet their needs (Manitoba Family Services, 1997:1). City welfare are for those people who do not fall into the categories of Provincial welfare and are seen as people who are "employable," or who do not face the same barriers as those who qualify for Provincial welfare. However, in both systems the recipients are "encouraged" to "get off" welfare and this is clearly stated in their literature. For example, the Provincial Welfare pamphlet it states: "The program is aimed, wherever possible, *at helping people find a job or get back to work* [their italics]; and to do everything you can to find a job and become independent" (Manitoba Family Services, 1997:1-2).

To qualify for welfare a recipient basically has to have expended most resources and monies before applying. When the people finally begin receiving welfare many find it difficult, even punishing, to survive on it. Any earned income has to be reported and money gains over a certain point, determined by the government, a dollar earned is a dollar taken off their welfare cheque. This does not leave much room for people to save some money while on welfare to create a cushion so that they can get off welfare. Nor is there much of an incentive to work or at least claim working at "over-the-table" jobs.

This can lead to casual “under-the-table” work with no stability and no benefits. When asked the question on the survey (Table 13) “Is your social assistance enough to live?” 38 out of the 52 people (73.07%) said no.

Food Bank Usage

The food bank clients who made use of the services of food banks tended to use them twice a month and had been using them for over one year. Specifically, 31 out of the 52 people surveyed (59.61%) used a food bank at least once or twice a month and had been using a food bank for over one year (see Table 14).

Table 14. Duration and Frequency of Food Bank Usage by Clients.

Duration of Food Bank Use	Frequency of Food Bank Use (times per month)					Total	
	1	2	3	4	Rarely*	N	%
1 month	3	2	1	0	0	6	11.5
3 months	1	1	0	0	0	2	3.8
6 months	0	4	0	0	0	4	7.7
12 months	1	1	1	0	0	3	5.8
over 1 year	7	24	0	1	2	34	65.4
No response	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	3	5.8
Total:	12	32	2	1	2	52	100.0

* Use occurs once over a period of 3 to 8 months.

HungerCount 1999 (September 1999:7) results show that 55.9% of food bank clients surveyed in Canada use a food bank at least once a month. The supply of food received from the food bank lasted anywhere, on average 1 to 7 days; with 37 (71.15%) of the respondents claiming the food they received lasting 4 to 7 days (see Table 15).

HungerCount 1999 (September 1999:7) shows us that nationally the food received by food bank clients lasts for 3 to 4 days for 48.8% of their sample size.

Table 15. Food Use and Food Shortages.

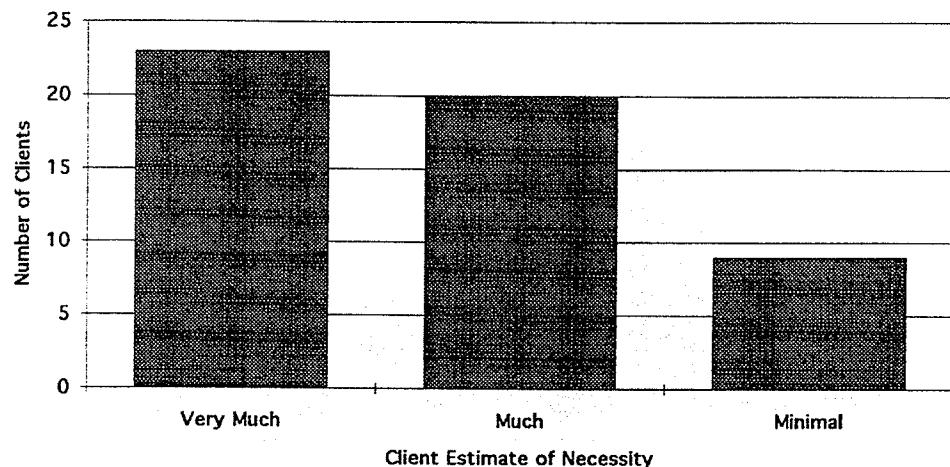
Time of Food Shortage	Duration of Food Bank Supply (in days)				Total		Use other Food Programs*
	1 to 3	4 to 7	8 to 14	15 to 21	N	%	
Beginning of the month	0	2	1	0	3	5.77	
Middle of the month	3	10	0	0	13	25.00	
End of the month	5	16	3	0	24	46.15	
All month long	0	4	0	0	4	7.69	
Variable	0	2	0	0	2	3.85	
Never	2	2	0	1	5	9.62	
No Response	0	1	0	0	1	1.92	
Total:	10	37	4	1	52	100.00	16

* The majority of clients used soup kitchens as a supplementary food program.

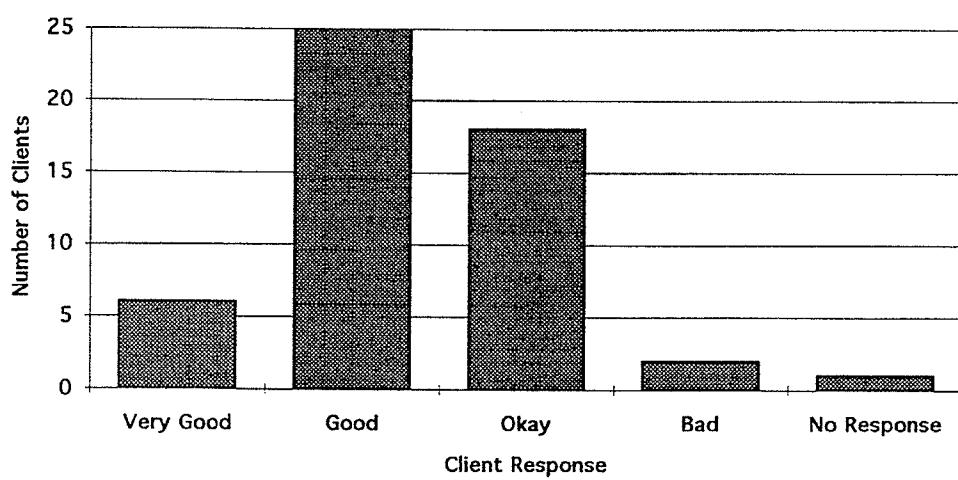
Almost half the respondents found they were short of food near the end of the month (24 of 52, 46.15%), with 25.00% finding they were short of food in the middle of the month (see Table 15). Because welfare cheques tend to come either all at once at the end of the month or are split bi-monthly, funds often run short for people near the end or middle of the month. Hence, the increase of food bank usage at the time before welfare cheques are issued.

Some people used other forms of food supplementary programs such as soup kitchens. Half of Sloan and Stewart's (1997:61) sample made use of a soup kitchen, while 16 out of 52 (30.76%) people in this study claimed to have used a soup kitchen in the past (Table 15). When posed the question "How much do you need the food bank?" 23 people said they needed it "very much," and 20 others said "much" (see Graph 9). The general consensus found the quality of food to be "good" and "okay" (see Graph 10).

Graph 9. Necessity of Food Bank Use



Graph 10. Client Estimation of Food Quality at the Food Bank



The quality of food has increased over the years, much of it due to the efforts of Winnipeg Harvest to collect good quality food and discard bad or rotten food. Much of the food tends to be dry or canned goods that have long shelf lives and are not prone to spoilage. Also, because of the large media campaigns through the efforts of Winnipeg

Harvest, organizations such as Peak of the Market have become involved in donating good fresh vegetables that are “store quality.”

SUMMARY

This chapter has attempted to provide a basic profile of a food bank client that. The data for the survey was collected at the two front-line food banks where I conducted this study. In my survey of 52 food bank clients 36 were male and 16 were female. The ages of the clients surveyed were highly concentrated in the middle years of 31 to 50 for both sexes and almost half the people surveyed were single. The majority of males (28 OUT of 36) had no dependent children, while almost half the women (7 OUT OF 16) had children. among the people surveyed only 11 had finished high school, while only 5 had received their high school equivalency. Fifty out of the 52 people surveyed lived in some sort of rental accommodation. Forty six of them were on some sort of government assistance. Although the sample size of the survey was quite small, many of the results of this survey tended to parallel the results of larger surveys and studies. These statistics, however, may be seen by many as sterile and never really tell the full story behind the numbers. All the numbers in this survey represent people and the next chapter attempts to put a human face on these numbers.

CHAPTER 6

THE PEOPLE: FOOD BANK CLIENTS AND SERVICE PROVIDERS

“One village can speak for many villages. One victim can speak for many victims.”

from Michael Ondaatje's *Anil's Ghost* (2000:275).

Beyond all the media representations of food banks and the sterile statistics that tell us why food banks exist and why people use them, we are still dealing with people. Like any organization, be it a school, church, or business, a food bank is about people; people who need, among other things, food. These are individuals who have families and friends, struggles and hardships, and joys and delights. Each and every person who has come across a food bank, either as a client, volunteer, or employee has his or her own story to tell. Throughout the research for this study, spending time at the food banks, getting to know people and talking and interviewing them, I was privileged to listen to many people's stories. From their stories I tried to understand what was going on in their lives while they used the food banks and what factors contributed to their needing to use these organizations.

My time spent at the front-line food banks, especially the Mennonite food bank, was where I met the majority of pastors, volunteers, and food bank clients. It was these people with whom I became involved that I interviewed. The interviews I conducted near the end of my fieldwork were in-depth with open-ended questions and dealt with very personal issues.

Because the nature of this study deals with people's private lives, gaining their trust and letting them know me was crucial, not only in terms of being able to delve

deeper into their lives for information, but in terms of respect for them as people. Thus, throughout the fieldwork I opened up and talked about myself allowing these people to know me. It was only fair that if these people were to tell me something about themselves then they should at least be able to know a few things about myself. To ask people intimate questions, during conversations and interviews, as if I were a reporter looking for a “story of the week,” would not have produced the type of responses I received had I not developed the rapport I had with the people at the food banks.

It was impossible to interview and quote every person I came across in my fieldwork. However, sometimes all it takes is a few key informants and quotes to illuminate the issues being dealt with. Often times a few people’s stories can speak for many people and the role this ethnography can play in the study of food banks, especially this chapter, is that it can provide a forum for people to speak up about their experiences using food banks and related issues.

The details and experiences may be different from person to person, but the end result is the same for most people; using a food bank was but one means in aiding them through difficult times (be it financial and/or personal), and for many the food bank had become a part of their lives, if for only one day a week. The number of interviews conducted was: four food bank client/volunteers (three men and one woman), two pastors (both male), seven volunteers (four males and three females), and two head directors of food banks (one male and one female). There are no interviews of food bank clients who had no role with a food bank other than being a client. Unfortunately, this was due to time constraints and not having any informants that had the level of confidence and trust in me as the other informants (ie. volunteer food bank clients) had in

me. All quotes are from interviews that I conducted unless otherwise indicated (see Appendix A for interview questions). Since the views and opinions of the employees (ie. Co-ordinator) and pastors have already been expressed in earlier chapters, this chapter will focus primarily on the views and opinions of the food bank clients/volunteers and to a lesser extent the volunteers.

THE PEOPLE

I came across a wide array of people while conducting the research for this study and identified four main groups of people who make up a food bank: 1) the Employees, such as the Co-ordinators and Executive Directors (some were former business executives and professionals who dedicated their time as employees to the running of food banks) and Ministers and Pastors (their role in running a front-line food bank is only part of their full-time job or “calling” as “men of god;” they have other duties, such as conducting services, counseling, etc.); 2) Volunteers, such as lay people of the churches that helped run the front-line food banks who felt it was, among their other Christian duties, to aid the poor; 3) Food Bank Clients/Volunteers who not only received food from the food banks, but gave of their own time to the running of the food bank, and; 4) Food Bank Clients whose main goal was to come for food and leave.

Food Bank Client Volunteers

During my weekly Thursday trek to the Mennonite food bank I experienced the same problems as many of the other food bank clients of having to get to the food bank on time and in any type of weather (Winnipeg winters can be quite brutal.). For me and

many other food bank clients this usually entailed walking to the food bank or getting there by bus. Over time I began running into the same people and seeing familiar faces.

Depending on what time a person arrived, the day began with either a cup of coffee, a cigarette, and small talk, or walking quietly into the church basement and joining the morning prayer, or making it on time for lunch. My closest confidant during my fieldwork was a young man by the name of Robert. He is a young single father with three children, having a nearly completed high school education (but with one year of University), and living on Provincial Welfare. It had been about five years since he had steady employment and had only worked on a casual basis at the Post Office during the Christmas season. The three other interviewees, Joseph, Daniel, and Kim were all in the same position as Robert (except that they did not have children): all were under-employed or unemployed, living on welfare, volunteering almost every Thursday, and making use of the food bank.

My interaction with these and other people during my research only occurred during the food banking hours. Like many of the other people I met during my research, I spent only a few hours a week (one day a week) at the Mennonite and Baptist food banks. The rest of the days of the week I was not involved in these people's lives and nor where they in mine. Such is the nature of a large urban setting where social networks cross at different places and at different times, sometimes briefly at a food bank. Thus, a food bank is one small but important part of a person's life and having to use a food bank is just one of the many problems that many of these people face.

Under & Unemployment & Barriers to Employment

For Robert, Joseph, Daniel, and Kim their employment status and work opportunities could be described as tenuous at best. Work for them was off and on, consisting of odd jobs with the majority of their income coming from welfare. Their barriers to employment could be broken down to “formal barriers” and “personal barriers.” Formal barriers can be defined as a lack of or not enough education and training whereas personal barriers can range a whole spectrum from disability, personal problems, and family matters. Not all of these people were willing to open up about why they could not work, but they provided me with enough information so that I could get a glimpse as to what prevented them from earning a reasonable living so that they did not have to use a food bank.

The “formal barrier” for these people’s inability to get work had to do with their level of education. As Allahar and Cote (1998:133) state:

those without a post-secondary degree are less employable in most sectors of the economy. Moreover, a university education is a good investment in salary level and future earning power. According to Statistics Canada, nearly two-thirds of new jobs between 1991 and 2000 are going to require at least 13 years of education or training, and 45% of them will require more than 16 years.

Of the four people interviewed Robert had the highest level of education with one year of university (he never did tell me if he finished a full course load or not or how successful he was at school), although he never did complete high school. Robert probably entered university as a mature student and was completing his GED (high school equivalency) at the time of our interview. Daniel received his GED but only completed up to grade 11, Joseph had a grade 11 education, and Kim only had a grade 8 education but was tested at an Adult Education Centre at about a grade 9 level.

However, after hearing these people's stories I began to realize that their level of education was the least of their worries. These people confided in me some of their most personal problems and had "personal barriers" that made it very difficult to secure work that was well paying and sustainable over long periods of time.

Of these four people Robert seemed physically the most able-bodied person who could work. Yet, Robert was in the same predicament as many single mothers who have difficulty holding down a good job while raising their children. With three children, ages 15, 9, and 8 Robert's last full time job was a contract position with the Board of Education. As he told me:

I had a contract there and then it got too hectic with the kids, because they were young. It's been about 5 years since I had a full-time steady job. I've been on a casual basis, I guess, a year, not even.

Casual meaning whatever odd jobs he can find. Robert's main source of income is Provincial Social Assistance, which amounts to about \$1100.00 a month. He qualified for this type of assistance because he was considered unemployable because, as Robert states:

My children, both of them were under the age of 5 when I started and they kept me on provincial because one of them...he's ADD [attention deficit disorder] and they consider that a special need, but they do want me to get back to work.

The \$1100.00 a month only adds up to \$13,200.00 a year and is well below the *Acceptable Living Level* (1997) figures of \$26,945.60 for a single mother with two children to live comfortably in a city the size of Winnipeg. I cannot even imagine what would happen if they did not consider his child a "special needs" child. Most likely his funding would have been reduced.

For Robert, getting back to work is difficult because he has to take care of three growing children. If Robert did not have any dependants to worry about he would be able to work whatever hours were necessary to support himself. But because children require a lot of time and money to be cared for, Robert has to schedule his time around his children. This means not being able to take a job where overtime is involved, evening or night shifts, shiftwork, and so on.

Robert was not the only one who worked odd jobs to make some extra money. Joseph, Daniel, and Kim were all unemployed and made extra money by doing light labour jobs such as yard work or house cleaning. It seems the only work these people were qualified for was one form of menial labour or another.

Joseph was a young single man with no dependants in his late twenties to early thirties who on my first encounter with him seemed healthy and quite willing to work. Unfortunately with a grade eleven education and a muscle disability called fibromialgia he was quite limited in what he could do. Prior to his disability Joseph said:

[I] had good jobs before, pretty decent jobs. I was making over \$100.00 a day at a lot of places where I worked and it was great for me.”

He went on Workers Compensation when he first developed his problem, then he shifted to City Welfare and has been on assistance for about nine years. His disability, as Joseph says, is a:

nerve muscle problem, my muscles lock up, so unfortunately I'm in the situation [I'm in], but I do what I can...My life has totally changed.

It is a muscle disorder that locks up his muscles and can strike him anytime and, “it could be anywhere on my body, my neck, my shoulders, my back,” as Joseph said. This makes him unreliable on the job and as Joseph told me, “you can't hold down a job,

because you got to be reliable to have a job. You've got to be there." The most he can do is some yard work that is within his physical limitations. The last time I spoke to him, he told me that he was going to a research firm that tested products such as soaps, creams, and so on. He said they were going to infect him with a cold virus then test some sort of anti-bacterial soap. They were basically paying him about \$200.00 to get sick.

Kim, the only woman to be interviewed, was in her late thirties to early fourties. She had a grade eight education and had been living on welfare for about 10 years (provincial at the time of the interview), walked with a bit of a limp, which indicated to me she had some type of physical disability and this could explain her being on provincial welfare (this of course is my own speculation). She did house cleaning at least once a week, and was planning to leave a relationship with her abusive alcoholic husband. On first meeting this kind gentle woman one could get a sense that she was "getting by." I had no idea that the life she leads now, at least according to her, is a lot better than the one she had before.

As Kim told me:

I'm an alcoholic, but I'm, through the grace of God and A.A. (alcoholics anonymous), I haven't had to take a drink for over eleven years [and that] ten years ago I was living to drink and drinking to live and getting stoned, if it was available, and that way of life was just existing.

Kim went on to tell me about her partner who:

drinks and what not. I was having a hard time and I realized, I finally got it through my head, I can't control him. I can't do anything for him unless he wants help himself. But I can do something about myself and I've made arrangements to live my own life and let him live his and as of the first of the month that's what I'm going to do.

The complexities of abusive relationships and addictions are beyond the scope of this thesis. It is not hard to comprehend the difficulties a person has trying to live with their addictions and in Kim's case having struggled with her own for a good decade. To have to deal also with a partner's addictions can be overwhelming. If using a food bank is "getting-by" for some people, then considering what Kim has gone through (and is going through), using a food bank and being a part of it by volunteering there is obviously a positive contribution to her own self-esteem and identity. To be honest, I do not know what happened to Kim after the interview, but months after I stopped going to the food bank myself, I noticed her, without calling attention to myself, in an alley rummaging and looking through some garbage dumpsters. I am not sure whether this was a one time occurrence or a normal activity of hers, but her actions and the story she told me were a reminder that what may seem like survival to many may actually be a life much better than the one Kim, and others, previously lived.

Living on Welfare & Costs of Living

The money the food bank clients received from welfare was not enough to live on. The overwhelming consensus among the four interviewees and through casual conversations with other people was that it was a hard struggle living on welfare. Along with the food bank and help from family, friends, and so on these people were "getting by." Without the support of the food bank times would be much tougher for these people. Kim told me, "without the food bank I wouldn't survive and I would go back to living on cigarettes and coffee," or as Daniel said, "if I didn't have that support [family and the food bank], I'd be one skinny person." Furthermore, living on welfare means less

or no luxuries, like no cable for television, and having to do without a phone. Both Joseph and Robert had cancelled their phone to save money.

Robert had to stretch his monthly \$1100 welfare cheque out because the cost of raising children. As Robert puts it, "well, in a sense yah buy, buy, buy, like school costs. The kids, they need new shoes, new socks, new underwear, because they're growing." Growing children means having to replace clothes that do not fit and "hand-me-downs" can only be handed down so much. For reasons of health and hygiene, certain clothing, such as underwear or shoes, has to be purchased new, not second-hand. Unfortunately because of the "culture of consumption" (Bodley, 1996:65) that pervades our society Robert, along with many other people, falls into the trap of purchasing more and more goods. Often times these goods that seem as necessities, upon closer inspection, are just wants (ie. new fancy running shoes that are part of a fashion trend) trumped up by advertisers to appear as non-luxurious goods that many of us cannot do without. The purchase of non-essential goods has become so pervasive in our society that often what is necessary (ie. daycare) is over-looked or downplayed, by individuals and various levels of government.

Essential services (ie. daycare) are necessary. As Robert said to me:

Money won't solve anything...If we had more services for single parents, like for me, I'm a single father. They have [programs for] single parent mothers, but I can't get into that program, or there's a child [program] for single parent mothers, but not for fathers.

In this case there is a reverse discrimination, as Robert says, "they say there's a lot of discrimination for women, but there's also for men." Even within the food banks there is a "necessary discrimination." For example, choice foods like milk go to people with

children whereas individuals with no young dependants, usually single men and women, do not necessarily receive these types of food products if the food banks have a low supply of them.

Robert also has the two younger children in an ABC program (After and Before Class) that cares for children before school starts, 7:30 a.m. till the start of school and after school finishes, 3:30 p.m. till 5:30 p.m. Welfare would not pay for this program and any time he used the program the cost came out of his own pocket. This program amounts to \$8.00 a day per child (\$4.00 for the morning slot and \$4.00 for the afternoon slot, plus \$24.00 for a whole day if the children have a day off from school) and does not seem to cater to people who work odd hours. This program amounts to \$16.00 a day (2 children at \$8.00 for a morning and afternoon slot) and if Robert used the program for a whole month the total would come to \$320.00 which is quite a lot of money to pay from his \$1100.00 welfare cheque.

Joseph illuminated the problem of living on welfare, especially for those like himself who were on City Welfare. Joseph received \$160.00 a month spending money from city welfare. The city paid \$249.00 towards his rent and he had to make up the other \$17.00 himself leaving him with a grand total of \$143.00 a month for food and any other wants or needs. Joseph said:

there's never anything left over, never. The honest truth is, I get my cheque and it's gone in a day. Because, if I know I don't go out and get groceries right away, I might accidentally spend it here and there and then be short on groceries.

For Joseph, living on City Welfare is much harder than if he were on Provincial Welfare. Joseph explained the relationship between food bank use and the type of welfare a person was on by stating:

people that are single and picking up for themselves, a lot of them are probably only on city assistance and there's quite a difference between city and provincial in moneys that are allowed to each...I'd say the people on city definitely need it [the food bank]. People on provincial, I think, if they spent their money wisely, it's probably not necessary for them.

Kim, like Robert, is on Provincial Assistance and receives \$459.00 a month, plus \$285.00 that goes towards her rent. Her rent is \$412.00 and she has to make up the rest of her rent out of her monthly cheque which leaves her with \$332.00 to cover expenses such as hydro, phone, food, other necessities, and non-essentials such as cable. As Kim confided in me she was living with her alcoholic husband. If for any reason he was not working or on any kind of assistance the money Kim received could also possibly go to support him. Kim told me, living on welfare is:

very hard, because I always have to figure out, in my mind, I'm thinking about how much money has to go for this [or that], and that only leaves me a little for the phone and whatnot. And I've got nothing left for myself to do the things I'd like to do. My hydro bill is 3 months behind...and is over \$80.00.

Although welfare is a crucial issue when discussing food banks it was not necessarily a topic of daily conversation at the food banks. It was only when I raised the issue during conversations or interviews that the topic came up. However, the food bank clients did not have to worry about what other people at the food bank had to say in terms of their use of the food bank or being on welfare because the majority of people at the food bank were there for the same reason, to get food because they did not have enough money and that their welfare cheques were quite meager.

The need to be cautious about openly complaining about food bank use or welfare rates was not an issue at the food banks. This is contrary to Cato Wadel's (1973) findings in his study of chronic unemployment in an outport fishing community in

Newfoundland where openly complaining about receiving welfare or the difficulty of finding work was a contentious issue. Life in a small village where most people tend to know one another makes it difficult to complain about one's "rights" to welfare and "talk about welfare payments between recipients and non-recipients is thus a delicate subject, but one which is hard to avoid" (Wadel, 1973:38) (It should be noted that this study was conducted some time ago so the attitudes that Wadel observed may have possibly have changed over time.). Using a food bank in a large urban centre is a relatively anonymous undertaking so "community sanctions" are not as great. Hence, if food bank clients wanted to, they could talk about issues surrounding welfare and food bank use without any real repercussions.

In the end, welfare and poor employment opportunities have only aided in keeping many of these people in the lower end of the economic spectrum. "While some argue welfare creates the very problems it tries to alleviate by setting up a system of perverse incentives that reward dependency rather than work, [Edin] argue[s] that the welfare system actually prohibits dependency by paying too little to make this possible" (Edin, 1991:472). As Edin (1991:472) states, from an American perspective:

The obvious solution to the problem of inadequate benefits or low earnings is to increase one or the other. The expansion of AFDC [aid to families with dependent children] is politically unlikely. [So] rather than focus on expanding benefits, I suggest we insure that those who work full-time can earn a living.

However, some people cannot work, or they can only work limited hours or certain types of work. Not only does the labour wage have to reflect the realities of the high cost of living in many North American cities, but benefits such as affordable child-care, child support payments, increased health coverage, and so on, have to be improved.

Food Bank Use & Experiences at the Food Bank

The people I interviewed had been using a food bank for a number of years. Robert had only been using the food bank for two years while Kim, Joseph, and Daniel had each used the food banks for up to five or six years. All four people were steady users of the food bank receiving food on average twice a month, to obtain food lasting only two to four days. Not one person wanted to use the food bank and if they did not have to, they would not take advantage of the free food. As Mark told me, "Well, if I don't have to use it I won't. Because I know somebody else will need it," or as Kim said, "I'll just collect when I really need it."

Using a food bank is not always a planned event but food bank use tends to occur when resources, for example food and money, dwindle. In the case of Robert, he was very conscious of having to balance his welfare cheque with his bills, the food at home, and caring for his children and when it would be best to use the food bank. Like Joseph, who tended to receive food in-between his bi-weekly (every two weeks) welfare cheque, Robert would use the food bank when he most needed it and thus planned for the week when he knew he would be low on funds.

Using a food bank for the first time is for most people a difficult and embarrassing experience. The experience can make one feel "intimidated and [feel] small," as was Robert's experience. Kim went into great detail explaining her first experience and how the food bank ran when she first started using it. As she states:

I used to have to line up out in the back and it'd be lined up for about half a block back. I felt so humiliated and embarrassed to line up in an alley. When the time came they would open the door and they'd have all the bags made up already and they'd just hand you a bag. I felt so dehumanized.

Over time the experience of using a food bank becomes easier, not just by getting used to it by going often, but because of the change of procedures of food distribution at some food banks. Organizers of food banks are well aware that they are dealing with people and often try to make their experience as easy as possible. As Kim went on to tell me, "they changed their procedures. After that they started opening the front door and people would go sit in the chapel for half an hour or an hour." The procedure now at the Mennonite food bank is set up so that a person only has to phone the food bank (in this case the Mennonite food bank who then calls Winnipeg Harvest with their order, while others not attending this food bank would call Winnipeg Harvest directly) and show up at their designated time eliminating any unnecessary waiting.

What started out as a necessity for the four people I interviewed became a weekly habit of visiting the food bank to volunteer, even if they were not picking up food. Their reasons varied as to why they started and why they continue to volunteer. Daniel's reason for volunteering was quite simple as he said, "I've seen other people pick up and I thought to myself I should volunteer." Kim felt that volunteering "made me feel better, like I'm not just taking. I didn't feel like such a worm. I'm not just taking [and] coming here to take food out." Joseph was a bit more "practical" about his reasons for volunteering but still had some altruistic beliefs about volunteering. He told me, "if you volunteer, you pick your groceries first. You get a better selection and if you help

somebody else, great! It works both ways. It helps me and I'm sure they [the food bank and its clients] need the help [too]."

Volunteering at the food bank was a positive experience for the people I interviewed. Also, because the food bank was affiliated with a church, these people made use of the religious services offered. The Thursday food bank was for some people their "Sunday at church." There were at least three services conducted at the food bank throughout the day so there was always an opportunity to attend a service. And if someone wanted to talk about a "spiritual or religious" issue, a volunteer, pastor, or church member was always willing to talk to him or her. Some food bank clients had already been active church members before they used the food bank while others began to "discover" religion while attending the food bank.

For Kim her spiritual beliefs probably began with her battle with alcohol long before she started using a food bank. Kim said:

my spiritual beliefs [are important, and] without it I'd be out there with a needle shoved up my arm or something. I feel God, as I understand Him, has given me my life back.

Robert on the other hand had some ideas about religion before using the food bank, but only began becoming active, with regular church attendance on Thursdays and sometimes on Sundays, with his frequent use of the food bank. As Robert said:

the more and more I come for food, [the] more I talk to the pastor here or the members here...I started to see things. It grew [seeking religion, by] coming more to the food bank.

Volunteering seems to be a positive experience for most people, but it can be stressing especially when having to work in a food bank. For Robert the difficulty was his knowledge that the food bank clients "want more [food] and you can't give it to them.

That's the hard part. That's the worst part." Whereas Daniel's attitude to the problem of people wanting more food was that:

people have the wrong attitude. They think it's like at a supermarket... 'oh, I want this one [type of food product], oh no give me that one,' no, you get what you get.

This is not to say that Daniel was a person without feelings, but that there is a reality that there is a limited amount of food.

Kim made an interesting observation about the difficulty volunteering at the food bank that had to do with the other non-food bank client volunteers and not on the other clients. Kim felt that it was:

difficult to get some of the other volunteers [retired financially stable volunteers] to understand the people [the food bank clients]. They're better off. They might have been through a little bit rough times in their life, but they have no idea what some of these people are going through. They walk through the food line, and it's not just poverty, they have no idea. I see them making comments about other people that walk through the food line and that upsets me. Because that's not right. [They make comments like] put downs about a person. A true Christian wouldn't feel the need to do something like that. I get the impression, that they think that if you, you're with god, that you'll do exactly what they, what their religion tells you to do.

Although I never personally heard anyone put down another food bank client, a conversation I had with one of the retired volunteers made me realize that there are differing opinions as to how the problems of poverty are viewed at the food bank and how they should be dealt with. The views of this elderly gentleman, if Kim heard them, could be construed as a bit naive and possibly condescending. He told me that:

We can help these people, that there is a better lifestyle for them, if they will ask for it. They will be taught about it, you know, and they have to find out about it for themselves, and what we believe [is that] a lot of these people didn't get a very good chance, because maybe their parents were in that same circle that they're in and their grandparents, and sort of keeps on, and if they can get out of that cycle, we feel that maybe that there's something better waiting for

them...what happens is that some people didn't learn anything at home, so they are like that, so it's sort of handed down.

It is possible that certain family habits can be passed on from generation to generation, but often times failure to succeed financially from one generation to the next may have less to do with learning from the parents, and more with experiencing the same social constraints that the parents went through (see Liebow, 1967:223). All people who work and volunteer at food banks do not necessarily take this gentleman's view. His views would be laughed at by those who are in the food bank line up, who would also be quite critical of his narrow view points and especially of his upbringing (educated, well off and retired, from an ethnic background that has done quite well in terms of financial gains) that could be considered privileged in comparison to those who are using a food bank.

This was not an easy conversation I had with the man and he had great difficulty at times trying to come to terms explaining some of his viewpoints. When I asked him at a later time to clarify how people could better themselves he was quite clear that "bettering themselves" (the food bank clients) was not necessarily in terms of material gains, but through the Lord Jesus Christ. He never had any ill will towards anyone and had only the best intentions in his opinions and as a volunteer, but if one takes into account that he was educated, religious, relatively well off, with a hard work ethic (but not necessarily realizing that being poor is hard work), it is possible to see how his views may have developed.

Service Providers: The Volunteers

There is a "loose" hierarchy in a food bank of those who "have," the employees and volunteers versus the "have-nots," the food bank clients. Yet, the nature of these "grass-roots" not-for-profit organizations is to try and leave such inequalities behind. This is conducive to food bank clients becoming involved in the running of food banks. This involvement may consist of unloading trucks full of food, to handing out food, or aiding in the running of a food bank (ie. sitting on co-ordinating committees, administrative work).

The organizational aims of food banks in Winnipeg are to try and provide an efficient flow of food to people. At the same time they are not meant to be, nor are they really, cold and impersonal. Food banks are not corporate-like in structure, such as in the business world where the idea is to "move-up" to a higher position with more pay. These "grass-roots" organizations may be structured in a bureaucratic way for efficiency, but they function in a different fashion so that there is a leveling effect, and that no one is necessarily more important than any other person. The egalitarian and fair attitude within the food bank system made it very easy to talk and associate with a wide variety of people. Unlike the presidents and CEOs of major corporations who are sometimes never seen or spoken to by their employees, in a food bank, be it front-line or main-line, all persons regardless of their position are almost always available, either to talk or help.

Volunteers run food banks and they could not exist without their help. A study conducted by Statistics Canada entitled *Caring Canadians; Involved Canadians* (1998:27), showed that "approximately 7.5 million Canadians volunteered their time and skills to groups and organizations across the country between November 1, 1996 and

October 31, 1997...Volunteers contributed a total of just over 1.1 billion hours of their time during the 12 month period." This unpaid work exceeds \$16 billion dollars (Picard, 1998:D2). Furthermore, the study claims "that people with strong religious ties volunteer at rates higher than the rest of the population...[and] those who attended religious services at least once a week volunteered at a rate of 46%, compared with 28% of those who did not attend services weekly" (1998:32).

The men and women I volunteered with at the food banks, particularly the front line food banks, were regular volunteers and were almost always present during my fieldwork. They all had regular attendance rates at their respective churches and all but one (a nurse) were retired. Most had had very good jobs and/or made a decent living prior to their retirement, for example two gentlemen were retired schoolteachers and another had owned a business and volunteered as one way to stay active.

The volunteers' attitudes while I participated with them were always upbeat and positive. Although my interviews with these people were not as in-depth as the food bank client's interviews, the general consensus amongst these volunteers was that their reasons for volunteering were to give back to the community or to help those who are less fortunate. Most of the volunteers felt that the enjoyable aspects of volunteering were working with people; but that the difficulties were in seeing the poverty and ever growing need for food.

One woman's volunteering efforts began by helping to pour coffee one day and that simple act of helping lead to eight or nine years of volunteer service. As Ellen (a retiree) told me, she began to volunteer because:

We [her and her husband] have an income we can live on and so I feel that there are so many people without job that I wouldn't want to take somebody's job, so there's lots of volunteering to do.

Why does Ellen continue to volunteer? As she states:

For me it's really been a time where I could share myself and get to know other people and become very close friends and you just share where you're at [and] relate to people on a one to one basis.

If one word could sum up food banks it would be sharing. The sharing of food, time, and friendship and in some cases faith. This need or desire to share is what keeps food banks, especially at the front-line food banks, running. In one sense a front-line food bank that is run with the intention to give and share is a safe, comfortable place where all can attend. Although the need for the sharing of food may be due to the political-economy, the need for food can at least be alleviated partially through kind acts.

The fact that food banks exist is a reminder for people as to why they are there, because people need food. As a volunteer told me:

Some of them [the food bank clients], you feel sorry for a lot of them because of [their] lifestyle or the way they have to live. Some of them aren't able to work or some aren't able to find a job or make a decent living for their families or for themselves. It must be very tough. And some probably have some mental problems or psychological problems [thus] they aren't able to get work for that reason.

Food bank clients and volunteers of the food banks know why they are there. However, that does not mean the mood is somber or sad, but a routine of ups and downs.

Many of the volunteers were regular church goers. Not only was volunteering and charity a part of being a "good Christian" but for some it helped them in their own religious beliefs. As one woman who worked as a nurse along with volunteering her time told me, volunteering at the food bank helped her faith because:

It's something that has to do with my Christian faith, talking to people or doing what I can. It makes me more thankful to God for what I have and just makes me realize how much we, how totally we have to rely on God for our needs and I think that is a really important thing...we're here to meet the needs of people and that's part of what we're trying to do here."

"Meeting the needs of people," can be considered the motto of the volunteers who help run the food banks. It is these volunteers (be they food bank clients or just average citizens) who are helping out those in need. Without their *charitable spirit* food banks would not exist in the form they are in today: grass roots, community oriented, and humanistic.

SUMMARY

This chapter has attempted to put a "human face" on the clients at the food banks. Each person has their own story as to why they are at a food bank, as clients, volunteers, pastors, or retired persons. For a few hours one day a week, two to three times a month, these small front-line food banks became a meeting place for many people. This chapter has attempted to show how the food bank clients live and survive and the daily struggles they face. Furthermore this chapter has attempted to show how food banks play a role in the lives of the food bank clients and the volunteers. For the food bank clients these organizations have become a meeting place to procure the food they need to help them survive and possibly develop friendships and social/support networks. Several main themes dominated the comments of food bank clients. They discussed in some detail underemployment and unemployment and barriers to employment. The barriers were divided into "formal" barriers, such as lack of education, or insufficient education as well as such "informal" barriers as disabilities, family difficulties, or personal problems.

Living on welfare was difficult for the people interviewed and the meager money they received was insufficient: the costs of living (ie. rent, utility bills) are usually higher than the money provided by welfare. The use of a food bank was a necessity for the food bank clients and most found their initial experiences at a food bank quite intimidating and somewhat shameful. Over time the food bank clients that did volunteer to help at the food bank did find their experience positive. For the volunteers who were not food bank clients, their experiences were also positive and they continued to volunteer for various reasons: out of a Christian sense of duty or because they felt a need to give back to the community. The next chapter concludes the thesis and is an analysis of the first world food system and how food banks are a symbol of its failure.

CONCLUSION

THE McDONALDIZATION OF THE FIRST WORLD FOOD SYSTEM & HOW FOOD BANKS ARE A SYMBOL OF ITS FAILURE

It has been the goal of this thesis to show how food banks have become adaptations to poverty and hunger. Since the first food bank opened up in Canada in 1981 they have expanded and grown in their numbers and in the number of people they serve. If food banks were a business their growth would be considered a success, but they are not a business and as non-profit organizations they would prefer to not be viable enterprises. As is explained in Chapter 2 there are various political-economic factors that have contributed to the growth of food banks: the increased rate of poverty, the "growing gap" between the rich and the poor, higher rates of unemployment, changing patterns of job stability, and a welfare system highly compromised by neo-liberal government philosophies and practices that have drastically cut funding to many social services. The people who organize food banks are adapting to these difficult social-cultural, economic, and political situations, unfortunately by having to grow and expand to meet the growing needs of their clients. However, these factors tend to be the usual explanations for the rise in the number of food banks and the growing "under-class" that use food banks. Another major issue to be considered when studying food banks is the first world commercial food system itself and how it contributes to the maldistribution of food.

Providing people with the funds necessary to purchase food may solve short-term hunger problems; but if the first world food system is geared towards only those people who have money, and if food is a necessity without which people could not survive, then this food system may partially contribute to the rise of food banks. "Because, the

primary objective of a commercial food system is to produce a financial return to investors, the system's ability to satisfy human nutritional needs on a sustained basis is a secondary, virtually irrelevant consideration" (Bodley 1996:113). Hence, food for profit rather than sustenance.

The food system in North America, in its present form, is failing certain portions of the North American population; namely the poor who do not always have sufficient funds to consistently purchase the appropriate quantities and/or quality of food over long periods of time. The rise in the number of food banks and in the number of people using them is evidence of the system's failure to provide sufficient amounts of food to this portion of the North American population. The system's failure does not result from the lack of food or from the inefficiency of the distributors (ie. supermarkets), but from a maldistribution of food because some people (ie. the poor) cannot always afford the food distributors provide.

The North American food system is a commercial one that is based on the economic system of capitalism that is "committed to an unbounded increase in production in the name of an unbounded increase in profits" (Harris, 1977:266). The type of capitalism that exists in present day Canada could be characterized as a monopoly or "corporate capitalism." This is a "form of capitalism in which large corporations emerge as a major form of ownership. Because of their size, these firms are able to exercise a substantial amount of monopolistic control over production and the market" (Li, 1996:17).

Specifically, monopoly or corporate capitalism, according to Li (1996:18) has features:

under which ownership and control of the means of production become concentrated and centralized in corporations, which operate through a web of ownership and control linking headquarters with branch plants that may be in different parts of the world. An important characteristic of monopoly capitalism is the ability of a relatively small number of large firms to maintain oligopolistic control of a particular industry.

The characteristics of “oligopolistic control” as defined above by Li can be observed in commercial factory food systems, especially in the first world. As Bodley (1996:114) claims these systems “involve an enormous concentration of political and economic power that produces vast profits for global elites but they are inherently insensitive to the needs of local human communities and ecosystems.” The concentration of political-economic power within the first world food system has shifted and is skewed in favour of the major distributors/retailers (ie. supermarkets).

“The tremendous growth in the control of the market held by the major retailers of food [has created a] concentration of economic power [that] has had an inevitable impact on the other “players” in the [food] system: consumers, food manufacturers (large and small), and primary producers” (Winson, 1993:161). With the advent of chainstore operations and supermarkets in late 1920s Canada, with such firms as Loblaw and A&P (Winson, 1993:161), a precedent was set for the concentration of a few food retail distributors. This concentration was due to factors such as increased urbanization (more people relying on fewer farmers for food) and changes in farming practices and technology (less human labour required but more energy inputs necessary, ie. fossil fuels, see Bodley, 1996:Chapter 5).

As Winson (1993:164-165) writes about the food retail distributors in Canada:

The degree of concentration in this sector of the food economy is extraordinary. By 1987, for instance, the largest five grocery distributors in Canada accounted

for about 70 per cent of all sales. In the United States, by comparison, the top five firms had only 24 per cent of total sales. In other words, the control of the top five firms in Canada was two and a half times that of the top five firms in the United States.

One of the effects of this concentration is to increase the price of food (food in Canada tends to be 10 per cent more expensive than in the U.S.) (Winson, 1993:166) and allow only a few distributors the control of this market, thereby increasing their profits and diminishing diversity and competition for choice, quality, and price.

In this present food system it is the food distributors (ie. Safeway, Costco) who have the most to gain and are some of the most powerful players, along with emerging “new players” such as large Agro-Biotech companies (ie. Monsanto, Cargill). For example, “two of the most prominent food companies [in Canada], George Weston and John Labatt Food, are part of extensive corporate empires. John Labatt Food is part of the Edper Bronfman group, the Canadian conglomerate with the largest number of companies under its control: 421 as of 1992” (Winson, 1993:118). The Weston Company has become the foremost food distribution company in Canada. Of their four divisions (food distribution, food processing, fisheries, and forest products) food distribution “accounted for 78 per cent of [their] total sales and 52 per cent of [their] total profits by 1987” (Winson, 1993:118). As for the “producers” (ie. farmers) and the “poorer” consumers of food, they have little or no political or economic clout to influence this system. An explanation of the evolution of this commercial food system--especially its distribution patterns--begins with the nature of capitalism itself.

To understand why the first world food system--especially the retailing of food--has developed the way it has requires more than just “blaming” capitalism and corporate

capitalism. One approach to the explanation of these modern characteristics of our North American food system is to view it as having become “rational” or “McDonaldized” (Ritzer, 1996). In his book *The McDonaldization of Society*, sociologist George Ritzer (1996) argues that, using the Weberian concept of “rationalization,” many segments of society (ie. education, health, welfare, government, food industry, etc.) have, and are becoming increasingly, McDonaldized. According to Ritzer (1996:1) McDonaldization “is the process by which the principles of the fast-food restaurant are coming to dominate more and more sectors of American society as well as of the rest of the world.”

The four principles that underlie McDonaldization--efficiency, calculability, predictability, and control--are a part of Max Weber’s concept of bureaucracy and constitute an extension of his theory of formal rationality (Ritzer, 1996:18). Ritzer (1996:18-19) explains Weber’s formal rationality as:

the search by people for the optimum means to a given end [that] is shaped by rules, regulations, and larger social structures. Individuals are not left to their own devices in searching for the best means of attaining a given objective...In effect, people no longer [have] to discover for themselves the optimum means to an end; rather, optimum means [have] already been discovered and [are] institutionalized in rules, regulations, and structures. People simply [have] to follow them. An important aspect of formal rationality, then, is that it allows individuals little choice of means to ends. Since the choice of means is guided or even determined, virtually everyone can (or must) make the same, optimal choice.

No longer do people have to discover varying methods to obtain food in Canada. The “optimum means” for people to procure food have been developed over the last century with the advent of a complex food system. People do not have to grow their own food, hunt, trap, fish, and trade and barter. The “optimum means” for the first world food system have been established: it is the supermarket.

The first world food system has become institutionalized, with rules, regulations, and structures that oversee the quality and quantity of food produced, industries dedicated to primary food production (ie. tractors, combines, fuels, oil, pesticides, fertilizers, biotechnology, university faculties dedicated to agriculture), businesses involved in the wholesale and retail aspects of food, and government interventions to control pricing (ie. on basic staples like milk, eggs, wheat), competitive practices (ie. anti-trust laws), and production (ie. Canadian Wheat Board). For the most part, the food system has become so efficient, within its own paradigm, that little effort is necessary for people to get their food. The little “choice of means” to ends in terms of food distribution is determined and set with little “choice” for a viable alternative. Ultimately, the distribution of food in the first world has become the major power point where the distributors have the most say and control (and profits) in this system. Even though a supermarket’s profit after tax average is only 0.5% to 2% (Kingston, 1994:55) that does not necessarily mean the actual dollars earned in net profit are low. For example, the net income of Loblaw Companies Ltd. for 2001 was \$563 million dollars and \$21.5 billion dollars in net sales (Gerard, 2002:C12).

The first world food system is driven by economic interests and it is, according to Ritzer (1996:144), “material, or more specifically, economic interests that drive rationalization in capitalist societies. Profit making enterprises pursue McDonaldization because it leads to lower costs and higher profits.” The food system in Canada (including the distributors) has developed its own formal rationality and has become McDonaldized. To be competitive in North America supermarkets have to function rationally; in other words they have to follow the four principles of rationality to make a

profit and survive. If the food system was less rational the owners of supermarkets would go broke and the price of food would go up. Yet, even before the price of food had a chance to rise, the current competitive free market economic system in North America favours another still more “rational” business to take over a failing supermarket. For example, currently there is a shift from more expensive small supermarkets to cheaper one stop shopping type stores such as Costco and Wal-Mart.¹ Hence, the corporate capitalist, oligopolistic nature of the food distribution system in North America allows only those few individuals and large corporations, ie. the “rational” businesses, which have the economic and political wherewithal to compete in this system and ultimately have greater control over it.

The goal of the first world food system is to make a profit; feeding people is secondary. Although the four principles of McDonaldization have their benefits (ie. maintaining order within an institution or bureaucracy) they can “inevitably spawn a series of irrationalities that limit, eventually compromise, and perhaps even undermine their [rational system]” (Ritzer, 1996:121) because of their potential for being dehumanizing. There is a fear that an “iron cage of McDonaldization” may dominate many sectors of society, including the food system, making it difficult to escape it (Ritzer, 1996:143). As Ritzer (1996:143) states “the ultimate irrationality of McDonaldization is the possibility that people could come to lose control over the

¹ Often times these stores are located in suburban areas making it difficult for food bank clients to access. As seen in Chapter 3, the majority of food bank clients tend to live in inner city “core” areas. Furthermore, inner city supermarkets tend to have higher prices than their suburban supermarkets. For those with access to a car and higher disposable incomes, access to the cheaper suburban stores is not as difficult as say for a food bank client.

system--that it could some day come to control them." This drive for higher profits has moved some people from the supermarket checkout line to a food bank line up. Food being a commodity, something sold for a profit, has become one form of social control forcing some people who cannot always afford food (or enough of it) to get it from such places as food banks, that are not part of the "normal" or culturally appropriate food distribution network.

One effect of McDonaldization on the first world food system is that "too many people are no longer in control of what they eat, whether or not they have sufficient income" (Riches, 1997b:73). There has been a "distancing," as Kneen (1993:17) claims, of people from their food. There has been a separation of people from "the sources of their food and nutrition with as many interventions as possible" (Kneen, 1993:17). Pelto & Pelto (1983:309) refer to this process as delocalization: "from the point of view of individuals and families at any one place on the globe, delocalization means that an increasing portion of the daily diet comes from distant places usually through commercial channels" for the purpose of making a profit. People, at least in present day Canada, are no longer "close" enough to the land to be able to produce and accumulate surplus food. As Riches (1997b:73) argues:

the result is that individuals, families and communities have become disempowered and deskilled in terms of their capacity to produce their own food, make sound choices when they purchase food and feed themselves nutritional and well-balanced diets.

This “distancing” or “delocalization,” especially between the distributors and the consumers, has created a situation where the distributors have lost touch with the fact that they are providing a “true human necessity.”

The “distancing” and “delocalization” of food from its sources and its consumers has allowed certain interest groups (ie. restaurant owners, supermarkets) to fill the void with their type of food distribution. The drive for profits in food distribution has thus changed the North American diet. To cut costs, make a profit, and save time for the restaurant owners and other food distributors, along with the consumers who are “eating on the run,” the “fast food” diet has become inundated with unhealthy foods. A necessary daily balanced diet is continually being challenged by convenient McDonald’s type foods (at restaurants or sold in supermarkets) that are greasy, high in fat and salt along with sugary sweet foods such as colas and candies. Even if certain individuals or groups wanted to change the types of foods they distributed or try and distribute more food at a lower price, these individuals and groups themselves would be fighting against the “iron cage” that supports them.

The relationship between a producer (and distributor) of food and its consumers has changed over the decades. This relationship is not only economic but social (Harris, 1981:22). In times when family members produced food to feed other family members or when there is some sort of “cultural” obligation for people within a community to feed others in culturally appropriate ways, then the “connection between producer and consumer [remains] intimate, permanent, and caring” (Harris, 1981:22). The “caring” connection between producer/distributor and consumer has eroded and changed to the

point where the owner(s)/shareholders of supermarkets do not see, "up close," those people who cannot always shop in their stores. As Harris (1981:23) states:

it is very hard for people to care about strangers or about products to be used [or consumed] by strangers. In our era of industrial mass production and mass marketing, quality is a constant problem because the intimate sentimental and personal bonds which once made us responsible to each other and to our products have withered away and been replaced by money relationships.

In the above passage, Harris discusses the decline in the quality of consumer products and how the alienation of workers who are confined to very specific work tasks (ie. repetitive type jobs) and never really know who the product is intended for, has lead to the decline of merchandise quality and customer service in North America. The same process is taking place in food production and distribution. The first world food system has become huge and complex and the consumer may possibly never meet the people (ie. farmers, food factory workers, supermarket owners, etc.) who helped produce and distribute the food they consume.

Even though food may not be readily available for the poor through normal channels in North America, particularly through a loss of "entitlements"² to food and an erosion of the social relationship to obtaining food from the main food distributors, other channels develop to procure food. In the first world, especially in Canada, it is through food banks. It is these types of organizations that become one of many adaptations to poverty and hunger for the poor.

² "Entitlement is a person's or household's ability to secure food, either as a *direct entitlement* from primary production, such as from a subsistence crop, or by *exchange entitlement* when food must be purchased or obtained by trade in the market" (Bodley, 1996:111, see also Sen 1990).

Food banks in Canada have become established and are now a part of the socio-political realities of the country. They have not become established because a few people are falling through the cracks of the “social safety net,” but, as the rapidly increasing number of people using food banks demonstrates. They are at least in part needed because of systematic problems with the welfare system in Canada, made worse by a food industry based on profit, growing inequality and poverty. Hence, as a reaction to these problems food banks have developed and created their own sub-culture of charitable organizations throughout Canada. This study of food banks in Winnipeg has attempted to show the specific impact of these factors that lead Winnipeg Harvest to become the main-line food bank in Winnipeg.

Winnipeg Harvest and the people that work and volunteer there provide the main co-ordinating function of getting food that has been donated to them to the front-line food banks. As the food gets to the front-line food banks the organizations that offer this service do so only on a part-time basis. They do not offer full-time food banking facilities, but tend to offer this service as only one of those offered by their organization. For example the church run food banks often only operate once a week, plus they still have their usual daily church functions, such as mass, spiritual guidance for individuals, and other community events.

Winnipeg Harvest can be seen as A hub of food collection and redistribution visible in the feverish activity of the warehouse, but ALSO AS A HUB of social and political activism. Because of Winnipeg Harvest’s continual exposure in the media, their needs and views have become quite well known. Yet, further down the chain one goes as the food leaves that well known organization, one encounters the lesser

known and “quieter” front-line food banks. This is where the people with the real problems of poverty and hunger come for food. These are the places where, instead of social and political activism, one can observe the daily problems people face, that are encountered, discussed and hopefully alleviated, if for only a few days with a few small bags of food. The roles these front-line food banks play are not the same as those of Winnipeg Harvest, but they provide a vital role in terms of aiding those people who need urgent help. The smaller front-line food banks have committed themselves to helping those in their community rather than letting people fend for themselves or having to leave the neighborhood to find food.

As an adaptation to poverty and hunger these food banks fulfill a need. The clients of these organizations are doing what people have been doing for centuries when there is a crisis, especially lack of food: they find a way to survive. Sometimes these survival tactics become a regular part of many peoples’ lives and become a part of their culture or sub-culture. Hence, the adaptation to poverty and hunger via food banks has become a long-term “band-aid” survival solution for the poor. Unfortunately food banks can only address the short-term needs of feeding hungry people rather than the underlying problems that have created the necessity for these organizations. Food banks are ultimately a symbol of the failure of various institutions in our society to meet the basic needs of its citizens. Fortunately, there are people who struggle against these social injustices, be it those who hand out food as a front-line of defence to hunger or those who try to ultimately change the way our society functions so that there is no longer a need for food banks.

FOOD BANKS: THE MORAL SAFETY VALVES OF OUR SOCIETY

Food banks help those in need, but they function also as a “moral safety valve.”

Poppendieck (1998:26) claims that food banks:

relieve the discomfort that people feel when confronted with evidence of privation and suffering amid the general comfort and abundance, thus reducing the pressure for more fundamental action. The sheer magnitude of community anti-hunger activity, and the widespread publicity essential to such efforts, create images of food drives and fund-raisers, of kitchens and pantries and food banks and food rescue programs, that permeate the culture. These images reassure us that no one will starve in our community, that the problem is being addressed.

This “moral safety valve” may ease the minds of the well off, those who work and can save money, people with good strong family and social-support networks to fall back on in times of need (or any combination of these factors); it nonetheless feeds into the growing ideology of “compassionate conservatism.” This is the ideology that has been promoted recently in the United States, especially by their president George W. Bush. It is a movement that, among other things, is trying to shift many social services away from government and into the hands of religious and non-government organizations (Saunders, 2001:A16). Although in Canada the shift towards weaker government and less social services has increased over the last twenty years, the tremendous influence of the United States over many countries, especially Canada, could continue to sway the pendulum towards the “compassionate conservatism” promoted by many right leaning conservatives.

According to Saunders (2001:A16), “compassionate conservatism” has lead Bush to promise to:

expand the scope of a 1996 law that allows people to redirect tax dollars to private charities and religious groups. He has stressed that those programs will also be offered by non-religious organizations. Mr. Olasky [author of

Compassionate Conservatism, which has greatly influenced George W. Bush] and his followers believe that poverty is not caused by a lack of money, but by a lack of moral values on behalf of the poor. As such, they see welfare as a poor alternative to religion.

This mindset only feeds into the old “Culture of Poverty” theory and ends up “blaming the victim.” Rarely do we see those in positions of power and wealth ever criticize those with money and say outright that their large wealth was made possible by inequality and a “Culture of Consumption and Greed” and that they lack the moral values to change the stratified society that has made them rich.

In the end what is left for the poor in our society is a “new gift,” old forms of charity with a new face, which reaches further into different parts our society more so than it has in the past. The poor and the organizations that deal with them are not as invisible as they once were. The main-line and front-line food banks have proliferated so much that they have now become another “charitable cause” along with the many other worthy charitable organizations.

What began as a stop-gap measure twenty years ago has become over time an established institution. Just as the ritual of competitive feasting began as a form of simple egalitarian redistribution to redistribute food to people evolving to complex ceremonies, so too have the food banks in North America. Only food banks have become established by the poor’s continued use of them in Canada and the United States and by the governments and businesses of these countries that use them for their own profit (by either dumping surplus food or as extensions of the welfare system). The fact is that such rich countries as Canada and the United States should not need food banks because there is enough food for everyone, however the problems of these societies in relation to food

insecurity can be attributed to their socio-economic stratification, strained social services, and rationalized food system.

EPILOGUE

It is important to study food banks because of the lack of information on these organizations, at least from an academic perspective. It is necessary to understand how food banks function and why they exist and I hope that the present essay contributes to this understanding. There were, however, limitations to this study and many were outlined throughout the body of this text. For example, the sampling size of my survey was too small, because I observed only two front-line food banks my perspective was limited and did not allow me to see how other food banks functioned. In retrospect, I feel that I might have made the usual mistakes a first time researcher makes, such as trying to tackle too many issues at once and not asking the right questions. Yet, these limitations are justified because a single researcher with limited time, money, and experience can only do so much. At the same time I feel that the work of one researcher can accomplish a lot and provide the basis for further research.

My one caution to those who endeavour to pursue any type of "poverty" study is to step back and think again about who you are really studying. The present essay is in some ways similar to the many other "poverty" studies often attempted by academics, anthropologists, journalists, in the sense that only the "poor" or "marginalized" are being analyzed. The discipline of Anthropology alone is filled with volumes of works dedicated to the dispossessed, the poor, the hungry, and the forgotten. The time has come to take the next step, especially in Anthropology, by using the methods and

procedures (ie. participant-observation and a holistic approach) that are the hallmark of this discipline and begin to study “the powers above.” Hopefully, I have risen above the study of the “marginalized” and have tried to contextualize the study of food banks in a historical, social-cultural, and political-economic framework. By doing this I hope to have shown that food banks are not organizations frozen in time, but the products of social forces that have lead to their rise. Food banks are now major charitable organizations in Canada that are continually changing, evolving, and unfortunately growing.

Now that the present essay and other studies cited earlier have provided a basis for the understanding of food banks, it is time to begin researching, observing, and interviewing the “power brokers” within government and in the food industry and the way these institutions affect not only our food security, but our everyday lives. At best, the majority of food banks can only react to the changes caused by the greater institutions of Canada. Food banks for the most part are not able to take a proactive approach to their desire to shut down without having people go hungry. The time has come to challenge the notions of what research really means and where the efforts of research should be concentrated. Perhaps it is time for the anthropologist to go into the field and learn the culture of the “power brokers” to understand who they are and possibly begin to show them the ramifications of their actions.

APPENDIX A

SURVEY FOR FOOD BANK CLIENTS

(questions are adapted from the Winnipeg Harvest food bank survey with their permission)

1) Gender: male...1 female...2

2) Age: 15-20; 21-25; 26-30; 31-35; 36-40; 41-50; 50+; senior citizen

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8

3) Marital Status:

married.....1
common-law.....2
single.....3
in a relationship.....4
separated.....5
divorced.....6
widowed.....7

4) Any dependent children under 18? y / n (if no go to 7)

5) How many? 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

6) Their age? _____

7) What is your level of education?

grade school (up to grade 8)..1
some high school.....2
graduated high school.....3
some college.....4
graduated college.....5
some university.....6
graduated university.....7
other training.....8
(please specify: _____)

8) What part of the city do you live?

Charleswood.....1	Assiniboia.....10
Tuxedo.....2	Transcona.....11
Fort Garry.....3	West End.....12
St. Norbert.....4	North West.....13
St. Vital.....5	North End.....14
St. Boniface.....6	West Kildonan..15
Fort Rouge.....7	East Kildonan...16
River Heights....8	North Kildonan.17
St. James.....9	Other.....18

(Please Specify: _____)

(Please Specify Neighbourhood: _____)

9) Housing, do you:

own a house/condo.....1
rent a house.....2
rent an apartment.....3
rent a room in a house.....4
share a house with roommate.....5
share an apartment with roommate...6
stay in someone's house/apartment for free...7
don't have a place.....8
other_____9

(please specify: _____)

10) Are you working? yes / no (if yes go to 11, if no go to 14)

11) If response is yes, ask: What kind of work do you do?

agriculture.....1
manufacturing.....2
construction.....3
services/retail.....4
business/professional.....5
finance/insurance/real estate.....6
education.....7
health and social services.....8
government.....9
self-employed.....10
(please specify: _____)
other.....11

(please specify: _____)

(please specify job title: _____)

12) Is it part-time or full-time? pt / ft

13) How much do you make in a week? (\$_____)x4 = (\$_____)

go to 18

14) What happened to the job?

quit.....1

fired.....2

laid off.....3

contract ended.....4

disability.....5

other.....6

(please specify _____)

15) Have you worked at all in the past year? yes / no

16) Are you looking for work? yes / no

17) Are you having problems finding a job? yes / no

18) Are you on social assistance? yes / no

if no go to 22

19) Is it: provincial / city

20) How much do you get each month from social assistance?

(\$_____)

21) Is the social assistance enough to live on? yes / no

22) Do you get money from other sources? yes / no

23) Where would this money come from:

friends.....1

family.....2

odd jobs.....3

other.....4

(please specify _____)

24) Is this your first time using a food bank? yes / no if yes go to 29. if no go to 25.

25) How long have you used food banks?

1 month.....1
3 months.....2
6 months.....3
1 year.....4
over one year.....5

26) How often do you use a food bank in a month?

once a month.....1
twice a month.....2
three times a month.....3
four times a month.....4
five times a month.....5
other.....6
(please specify: _____)

27) Do you use a food bank as:

your only source of food.....1
your main source of food.....2
as something to add to the food you have at home?.....3
other: (please specify _____).....4

28) When do you use a food bank?

before money runs out.....1
after money runs out?.....2
both 1 and 2.....3

29) Can you put money aside as savings each month? yes / no

30) What do you do to cut costs?

shop for specials.....1
use coupons.....2
use food banks.....3
don't eat out.....4
miss a meal.....5
children miss a meal.....6
other.....7

(please specify: _____)

31) Where do you normally buy your food?

supermarket (Safeway, Superstore, etc.)....1

small grocery store (Foodfair, etc.).....2

convenience store (7-11, Mac's, etc.).....3

other.....4

(please specify: _____)

32) How did you find out about the food bank?

friends.....1

family.....2

stranger.....3

newspaper.....4

radio.....5

t.v.....6

church.....7

community centre....8

other.....9 (please specify _____)

33) Do you share the food you get from the food bank? y / n

if yes go to 34 if no go to 35

34) How many people are sharing the food you get today? (ie.friends, family)

0 1 2 3 4

(if 1 or more are sharing food ask Who are they?)

1 / 2 / 3 / more

(_____ / _____ / _____)

35) Have you ever run out of food in the past? yes / no

36) What did you do to make ends meet?

ask for government assistance....1

beg.....2

get a loan.....3

borrow food.....4

call friends for help.....5

call family for help.....6

other.....7

(please specify: _____)

37) Do your children go without a meal because a shortage of money?

yes / no / na

38) What do you think about the food you get?

very good.....1

good.....2

okay.....3

bad.....4

very bad.....5

39) Is the food enough to help you out? yes / no

40) Is the food bank close to where you live? yes / no

41) Were the people at the food bank helpful? yes / no

42) Will you ever use a food bank again? yes / no

43) How much do you need the food from the food bank?

very much.....1

much.....2

a bit.....3

44) Do you volunteer here at all? yes / no

45) Have you ever run out of food and money in the past and could not get to a food bank?

yes / no / na

46) Do you ever go without a meal because of a shortage of money? yes / no

47) What time of the month do you find you run short of food?

beginning.....1

middle.....2

end.....3

all month long.....4

48) Is the food bank available when you need it the most? yes / no

49) How long does the food you get here last?

1 to 3 days.....1
4 to 7 days.....2
8 to 14 days.....3
15 to 21 days.....4
22 to 30 days.....5

50) Do you like the food you receive? yes / no

51) Are you able to eat all the food? yes / no

52) Do you throw any of the food away? yes / no

53) Is this the type of food you would normally buy? yes / no

54) What kinds of food would you like to see offered that you want or need?

fresh fruits.....1
fresh vegetables.....2
fresh meats.....3
fresh dairy products.....4
fresh eggs.....5
more variety of canned goods....6
baby food.....7
religious foods.....8
other.....9
(please specify: _____)

55) Is there food you get that you cannot eat?

yes / no if yes go to 56 if no go to 57

56) Is this because of:

religious reasons / health reasons / personal reasons

(please specify: _____)

57) Is this the only food bank you visit? yes / no

58) Do you make use of any other meal program (ie. soup kitchens)

yes or no (please specify if yes: _____)

59) Do you come early to the food bank? yes / no

60) Do you stay around after you get your food? yes / no

if yes go to 61 if no go to 62

61) What do you do when you stay around?

talk.....1

drink coffee.....2

eat.....3

ask about religious services..4

other.....5

(please specify: _____)

62) Do you have friends here? yes / no

63) Have you made new friends here? yes / no

64) Has the food bank helped you in other ways other than giving you food?

yes / no

if yes go to 65

65) What has it done for you?

provided clothing.....1

job leads.....2

provide useful information....3

religious support.....4

friendship.....5

other.....6 (please specify: _____)

END: if religious organization continue

66) Do you mind coming to a church to collect your food? yes / no

67) Are you a member of this church? yes / no

if yes go to 70 if no go to 68

68) Have you considered joining it? yes / no

69) Has anyone ever asked you to join it? yes / no

70) Is there any type of prayer before the food is given out?

yes / no if yes go to 71 if no go to 72

71) Do you mind having to sit through a prayer before getting your food?

yes / no / don't care

72) Is the religious aspect important to you when getting food from the church?

yes / no if yes go to 73

73) How important is the religious aspect?

very important.....1

important.....2

neutral.....3

somewhat important.....4

not important.....5

APPENDIX B

QUESTIONNAIRE FOR FOOD BANK ORGANIZERS

- 1) What is your name, position, and name of your organization?
- 2) What is the purpose of your organization?
- 3) Is it a full-time food bank? Yes or No?
- 4) When did you begin offering the services of a food bank?
- 5) Why did you start up a food bank?
- 6) Why do you continue to run a food bank?
- 7) If a religious organization ask: Would you like to see some of the people who frequent your food bank to become a part of your congregation?
- 8) Is there any type of prayer before the food is distributed?
- 9) Do you feel since you have opened your food bank it has helped your organization/church?
- 10) Why is there a need for food banks?
- 11) Is your food bank accomplishing its immediate goal of feeding people properly?
- 12) Does your organization provide enough food to its clients?
- 13) What kind of food do you distribute?
- 14) What do you think of the quality of the food you provide?
- 15) Where does your organization get its food and funding?
If some or all food comes from Winnipeg Harvest ask:
What is your relationship with Winnipeg Harvest?
Is it a strong relationship?
How important is Winnipeg Harvest to your organization?
Do you keep a relationship beyond receiving food from Winnipeg Harvest? if yes ask:
What is that relationship?
- 16) Do you seek out or receive government support?
If yes, why?
- 17) If no Why not?
- 18) If yes, Have you ever had your funding cut off?
- 19) How did you cope with that situation?
- 20) How is the food distributed to the people?
For Winnipeg Harvest ask how is food distributed to the various organizations?
- 21) Why is a neighbourhood/community based model used for organizing food banks rather than having just one large food bank?
- 22) Which model do you prefer?
- 23) Have you had any problems with your food bank?
- 24) Have you had any problems with other food banks?
- 25) With Winnipeg Harvest?
- 26) Have you had any problems with the food bank clients?
- 27) Do you have difficulties finding volunteers?
- 28) Keeping volunteers on for a long term?
- 29) Do you want to see food banks shut down?
- 30) What, if any, measures are being taken to shut down food banks (in general and specifically)

- your own) without having people go hungry?
- 32) Should food banks go beyond their role of donating food?
- 33) Can food banks be seen as something other than food banks,
for example agencies for poverty advocacy?
- 34) Should food banks become more political?
- 35) Do you consider it your organization/food bank's responsibility to be poverty advocates?
- 36) If no, why?
- 37) If yes, why and to what extent do you advocate for the poor?
- 38) What role do you see your organization/food bank playing in the future?
- 39) Food banks in general?
- 40) What are your short term goals for your food bank?
- 41) Long term goals?
- 42) Are there any immediate changes you would like seen done at your food bank?
- 43) Long term changes?
- 44) Do you have a paid staff?
- 45) Are you paid for your position?
- 46) Have you ever used a food bank?
- 47) If yes, What circumstances lead you to use one?
- 48) What was your experience like?
- 49) What are your feelings about food banks?
- 50) Is there anything else you would like to add?

QUESTIONNAIRE FOR FOOD BANK CLIENTS

- 1) Gender: 1. male or 2. female
- 2) Marital Status: 1. married/living together 2. single 3. separated 4. divorced 5. widowed
- 3) Any dependent children? How many? Their age?
- 4) What is your level of education?
- 5) What part of the city do you live in?
- 6) What type of housing do you live in?
- 7) Are you working? If unemployed go to 1a.

If response is yes, ask: What kind of work do you do? Is it part-time or full-time?

(go to 1b)

- 1a) Have you worked at all in the past while? What happened to the job? Where do you get money from (social assistance)? (provincial or city?) How much do you get from social assistance?
- 8) Do you find welfare (and or your job) enough to live on? (yes or no)? Is it hard living on welfare? why?
- 9) What do you think would make things easier for you while being on welfare? (a bit more money each month? easier case worker?)
- 10) From the money that you get monthly from welfare/and or your job--is enough left over after all your bills are paid for food?
- 11) Is this your first time using a food bank? If yes go to 2a.
- 12) How long have you been using food banks for?
- 13) Is this off and on or steady?

- 14) How often do you use food banks in a month when you do use them?
- 2a) What made you come to the food bank?
- 15) Do you get food from other places other than supermarkets? (ie. soup kitchens)
- 16) When coming to the food bank are you low on food and or money at home?
- 17) Is the food you get enough to help you out?
- 18) How many people are sharing the food you get today?
- 19) Have you ever run out of food and money in the past? What did you do to make ends meet?
- 20) Do you ever go without a meal because of a shortage of money or food?
- 21) (if applicable) Do your children go without a meal because a shortage of money?
- 22) What do you think about the food you get? Is it enough to help you out?
- 23) How long does the food last?
- 24) Is the food bank close to where you live?
- 25) What time of the month do you find you run short of food and money?
- 26) Do you schedule using a food bank? (for example when your welfare runs short do you use the food bank more?)
- 27) Do you use a food bank when you get more money, for example from some cash bonus or a lottery winning?
- 28) What was/is it like using a food bank for the first time?

ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS FOR VOLUNTEERS WHO ARE FOOD BANK CLIENTS

- 28) How long have you volunteered here for?
- 29) How did you start volunteering here?
- 30) Were you a food bank client first then a volunteer or was it the other way around?
- 31) Why do you volunteer here?
- 32) Do you find now that you volunteer here you get more food rather than just lining up for it?
- 33) Are you involved with the religious part of this food bank?
if yes ask:
- 35) How important is the religious part to you?
- 36) Is the religious part something that grew with your volunteering here or did it begin before your volunteering here?
- 37) Do you come to this church's services other than on the day of the food bank?
- 38) Do you find by becoming active with this church it has helped you out? How so?

QUESTIONNAIRE FOR FOOD BANK VOLUNTEERS

- 1) Your age and your occupation?
- 2) How long have you volunteered at this food bank?
- 3) How often do you volunteer here?
- 4) Do you volunteer anywhere else?
- 5) How did you become involved with volunteering here at the food bank?
- 6) Why do you volunteer here?
- 7) Is volunteering here important to you? Why?
- 8) What is it like volunteering here?

- 9) What was it like volunteering here the first time?
- 10) What is the most enjoyable aspect of volunteering here?
- 11) What is the most difficult aspect of volunteering here?
- 12) Are you a member of this congregation?
- 13) Is your religion/faith an important part of your life?
- 14) Has volunteering at the food bank helped you with your religious beliefs? How so?

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