

The Right to Food and the Right to the City: An argument for ‘scaled up’ food activism in
Vancouver’s Downtown Eastside

By

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ABSTRACT

As food insecurity increases among socio-economically marginalized populations, community-based efforts to address these issues have received particular attention for their potential to promote justice in food systems. This thesis presents a case-study analysis of right to food (RTF) activism in Vancouver's Downtown Eastside (DTES), a community where decades of failed government policies and economic disinvestment have produced high levels of poverty as well as organized resistance and activism. I explored this localized movement through key stakeholder interviews (n=17) and 10 months of participation at a community-based organization. My findings suggest that local efforts to organize around RTF may have had some success in challenging the dominant discourse and practices associated with the entrenched charitable food model. However, these efforts are limited in their ability to 'scale up' this work to transform the systems that produce uneven urban food environments. I argue that the barriers to food access in the DTES are inextricably tied to broader historical contestations over urban space produced by processes of capitalist urbanization. Drawing on Lefebvre's 'right to the city,' I suggest how RTF activism in the DTES could benefit from linking more explicitly to the collective struggles facing wider efforts to reclaim the city.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Context

Canada has a global reputation as a leader in human rights and has, over the last 60 years, signed numerous domestic and international agreements to uphold the universally agreed upon right to food (RTF), including the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the World Declaration on Nutrition and the Canada's Action Plan for Food Security (Rideout et al. 2007). Yet, food insecurity is a present and growing concern among vulnerable populations in Canada (People's Food Policy Project 2011). Food insecurity refers to both the limited or uncertain availability of adequate nutrition as well as the inability to access food through dignified channels. It has been measured at a number of levels, including the individual, household and community (Tarasuk 2001). There are a number of proximal factors that relate to food insecurity, including material poverty, low educational attainment and gender inequality (Hanson 2011). However, the root cause of food insecurity in its contemporary manifestation has been attributed to the introduction of neoliberal food and food-related policies since the early 1990s, which have created a triple burden of vulnerability, including inadequate social assistance, widening socio-spatial inequalities in cities (including reduced access to food), and an increasingly de-regulated food system (Rideout et al. 2007).

As food insecurity has intensified in Canada over the last three decades (Wakefield et al. 2012) food banks have ceased to be the temporary emergency response they were originally created for and are now seen to be among the first recourses to address food insecurity in low-income

communities. During this time, the use of food banks nationally has risen steadily. Between 2008 and 2014, Canada saw an increase of almost 165,500 food bank users across the country (Pegg & Stapleton 2014), provoking the critique that the existence of food banks allows governments to continue to deny RTF for Canadian citizens (De Schutter 2012). The shift toward charitable food provision has also influenced the way that issues of food insecurity are framed at a policy level, moving the discourse from a language of rights to one of benevolence (Rideout et al. 2007), where recipients of social services are ascribed the identity of clients instead of citizens (Roe 2010).

In part due to the devolution of government responsibility for social welfare, municipalities have emerged as leaders in recent years on initiatives to develop local solutions to environmental and social food system issues, including efforts to address the issue of community food insecurity (MacRae & Donahue 2013). Many cities in Canada have seen the creation of municipal food policy councils in addition to grassroots level community activity. Much of this activity, which falls under the broad umbrella of ‘community food security’ and is also often recognized as part of a contemporary ‘food movement’ is focused on the promotion of local food through projects such as urban farmers markets and community gardens. Initiatives to promote food security in socio-economically marginalized communities may identify with a variety of paradigms including ‘food justice’, ‘food sovereignty’ or RTF, which have overlapping as well as divergent philosophies and mandates.

Critical geographers have taken an interest in community-level efforts to strengthen local food systems, examining the food movement both as a site of transformative politics as well as its role

in the reproduction of social inequities. Importantly, geographers have effectively built the argument that inequitable food geographies are just one component of a broader context of spatial inequity that concerns urban communities, particularly with reference to how space is developed and appropriated in cities (Bedore 2010). How exactly more equitable food geographies are created, and how this is linked to considerations of spatial justice, is a question that warrants further investigation.

The concept of the right to the city (RTC), as a lens for understanding and critically examining urban resistance, offers a potentially productive avenue for reconceptualizing RTF and other movements within the community food security paradigm. There has been a resurgent interest among academics in how RTC can be used as a tool to understand and support the efforts of urban residents to remake the city to meet their needs. Lefebvre's (1968) concept of RTC is premised on the notion that the driving force of capitalism has shifted from industrialization to urbanization. Unlike 19th century Marxism which saw the "end game" as a struggle between the worker and the factory owner for control over the means of production, the struggle today involves the efforts of a wider plurality of exploited people coming together to undo the capitalist regime over their everyday lives (Harvey 2013). RTC calls for a radical remaking of the urban form, putting forth the idea that urban inhabitants have the right to change the city "after [their] heart's desire" (Park 1967:3). While the popularity of RTC as a theoretical framework grows, there is a need to identify its practical applications through empirical research. It is this consideration that makes RTC a compelling conceptual lens through which to view struggles to create spatially and socially just food systems for urban inhabitants. The connection between the struggle for RTF amongst urban inhabitants and the theoretical framework of RTC

has begun to be examined (McClintock 2013; Shillington 2013); however, this association is underexplored in food geography literature.

1.2 Research setting

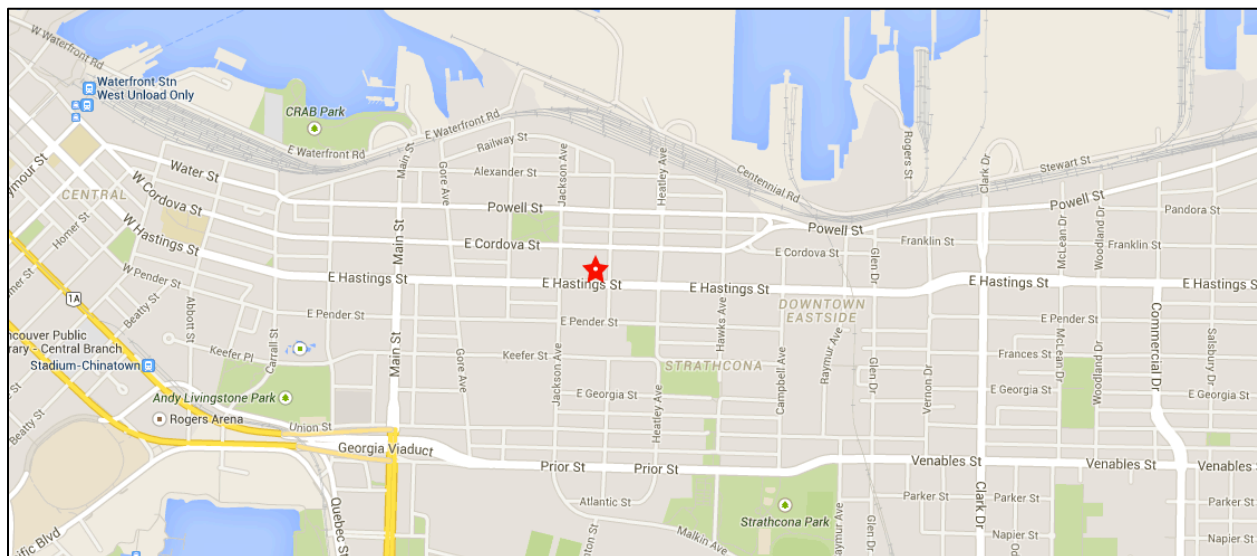
1.2.1 Emergence of right to food activism in the Downtown Eastside

This thesis focuses on a nascent RTF movement in Vancouver's Downtown Eastside (DTES). As both a conceptual framework and grassroots organizing principle, RTF can offer a useful inroad into revealing pathways for urban inhabitants to address intersecting social and economic disparities that contribute to food insecurity at the local scale. The DTES is a community with a long history of both disenfranchisement and resistance, where the struggle for the recognition of basic human rights among residents is embedded in the collective consciousness of the community (Pederson & Swanson 2009). As a result of many years of disinvestment on the part of government, and despite valiant but largely insufficient concomitant responses from the non-profit and charitable sectors, the level of access to and availability of fresh, nutritious food in the DTES is low. Many DTES residents rely on the charitable sector for food, which itself depends on donations that are often poor quality and may not address the health concerns or cultural preferences of community members (Barbolet et al. 2005). In recent years, residents and activists in the community have adopted RTF as an organizing tool, a platform from which they can name and work against oppression and disenfranchisement in the DTES. This coalescing around RTF has been observed by some as having made an impact on improving the food provisioning practices in the DTES, both in the quality of food provided and the means by which it is served (Miewald & McCann 2013). This effort by community members and activists in the DTES to use rights claims as a tool to reshape the urban environment was what influenced my decision to explore the connection between community-level RTF activism and RTC.

1.2.2 The Downtown Eastside Neighbourhood House

For the past several years, one organization, the Downtown Eastside Neighbourhood House (DTES NH), has been explicitly working to assert the right of DTES residents to high-quality, culturally appropriate, nutritious food, challenging what its staff perceive to be a largely traditional approach to food insecurity offered by the charitable sector dominating the food choices of neighbourhood inhabitants. The DTES NH was established in 2005 through the efforts of a steering committee of 27 community members and from its inception had an explicit mandate to promote RTF in the neighbourhood. For the first two years the NH operated without a physical space but as programming grew the organization began renting a small storefront on the corner of East Hastings St. and Jackson Ave. Continued growth prompted a move in 2009 to their current location at 573 East Hastings (see Figure 1) in addition to registering for charitable status and electing a board of directors.

Figure 1: Map of Downtown Eastside indicating current location of DTES NH



The DTES NH widely cites RTF as a foundational principle of their work, declaring this right on documents posted on the walls of the organization, on their website and in promotional materials. Two of the early programs of the DTES NH were nutritional outreach initiatives that took place on the street and at different organizations around the community, created with the intention of extending the programming of the DTES NH beyond its physical structure. In the beginning, *Banana Beat* and the *Mobile Smoothie Project* aimed to collect feedback from community residents about what they wanted from a Neighbourhood House while supplying nutrition before and on ‘cheque day’ – the day that neighbourhood residents received social assistance cheques. The DTES NH saw both practical and symbolic significance in having outreach programming on these days. First, the end of the cheque cycle was the time of month when residents would have the least money and therefore greater nutritional vulnerability. Second, having *Banana Beat* occur on cheque day represented an opportunity to engage with a great number of community residents as many were waiting in lines to receive and deposit cheques. This aspect of the program was of key importance to founders of the DTES NH as it served as an ‘intervention’ in the line-up, an opportunity to disrupt what was seen as an undignified but everyday experience for community residents. *Banana Beat* and the *Mobile Smoothie Project* continue to be two core programs delivered by the DTES NH.

1.2.3 The broader ‘food movement’ in Vancouver

The creation and development of the DTES NH and its food-centred programming has taken place at the same time that Vancouver has seen a variety food-based initiatives blossom across the city and at the municipal level. In 2003, the City of Vancouver passed a motion to develop a more “just and sustainable” food system (COV 2013a). Out of this, the Vancouver Food Policy

Council (VFPC) was formed in 2004 as a volunteer advisory committee to City Council. The VFPC produced a Food Charter in 2007 which identified five key areas to focus on in their work, including community economic development, ecological health, social justice, collaboration & participation, and celebration. Within this charter, the VFPC recognized food insecurity as an important and growing issue, citing both the growing reliance on food banks and increasing incidence of homelessness in the city (COV 2007).

More recently, the City of Vancouver released the report, *What feeds us: Vancouver Food Strategy* (COV 2013a), intended to be a comprehensive, systems-based approach to developing a more just and sustainable food system through policy and planning, informed by the work of the VFPC. The report lays out five priority areas, which include food production, empowering residents, access, processing/distribution and food waste. Throughout the report, food ‘assets’ within the city including the proliferation of farmers markets, community gardens and urban farms are frequently cited as being cornerstones of a robust and inclusive food system.

Acknowledging the role of income inequality, social polarization and a lack of affordable housing in increasing food insecurity in Vancouver, ‘access’ is defined as a goal to “improve access to healthy, local, affordable food for all by increasing the number of healthy food retail including farmers markets, community food markets, and piloting healthy food retail programs” (COV 2013a). A priority area in the Food Strategy document was providing support for neighbourhood food networks, a coalition of food system actors and organizations across the city, which includes both the DTES NH and the DTES Kitchen Tables Project. In large part due to the work of these two organizations, the neighbourhood food networks have adopted a “right

to food philosophy” (COV 2013b), advocating for greater access to affordable, nutritious, culturally appropriate and sustainable food in communities across the city.

1.3 Research conceptualization

I became involved with the DTES NH as a volunteer in the Spring of 2013, drawn to the organization because of my own previous involvement with other community-based work in food security. Coming from Winnipeg, I was particularly interested in Vancouver’s reputation as a municipal leader in food security initiatives and believed that the work of the DTES NH could be understood as one component of this broader food movement. I quickly learned that RTF activism in the DTES was complexly tied up in the politics of exclusion and displacement in the neighbourhood, with a philosophy and mandate that was sometimes at odds with the predominant food security initiatives that were being advanced at the municipal level. I was intrigued by this tension and wanted to clarify my understanding of what it means to create a “just and sustainable” food system within the context of a broader discourse of inner city deprivation and concomitant food activism. I decided to frame RTF activism as an effort to not only challenge the charitable model of food provision but also a potential tool to confront the structural processes that contribute to the marginalization of low-income community members in the DTES. RTC, as a lens that encourages us to see how multiple everyday struggles of urban inhabitants might be understood collectively for their potential to reclaim and remake space in the city, lent itself well to my line of investigation. The integration of RTC into my inquiry gave me the opportunity to identify some of the challenges and successes of RTF activism and advance a critical discussion of the theoretical and practical approaches that might strengthen and expand this work.

The main goal of this thesis is to document RTF organizing in the DTES, focusing on the activities of the DTES NH to determine the potential that this local-level organizing has to engage with multi-scalar struggles over the right to the city. My research had the following objectives:

- (1)** To examine the historical context of food insecurity and activism in the DTES through a blended analysis of textual data and one-on-one interviews with longstanding members of the DTES community;
- (2)** To investigate the role and influence of the DTES NH in advancing a RTF approach to food insecurity in the DTES via participation and observations in the research setting and interviews with community members and individuals involved in RTF work; and
- (3)** To explore the potential scaling up of local food activism into a broader geographical context of RTC that confronts exclusionary urban dynamics/changes in Vancouver by interviewing RTF activists and advocates in the community as well as at the municipal level.

1.4 The organization of this thesis

This thesis is organized into 5 chapters. This chapter has introduced the research context and theoretical framework, highlighting the history of the case study setting and my research objectives.

Chapter two expands upon the research context and theoretical foundation of this thesis. It outlines the genesis of charitable food provision in Canada and the entrenchment of this model as a result of neoliberalization. The chapter then discusses the recent fascination of geographers

with questions around food and spatial justice and explores the concept of RTC, identifying how it can be useful in revealing the shortcomings as well as possibilities of community-level activism around food. Finally, the chapter details the historical context of the DTES, situating contemporary concerns about food access within this history.

Chapter three presents the methodological framework of this project. It explains the process of community entry, ethics protocol and justification for the research methods used. The chapter outlines my procedures, including a textual analysis, key stakeholder interviews, focus groups and a roundtable discussion. It also details my approach to data analysis, explaining how I generated the themes and interpretations in the thesis.

Chapter four presents the results of the research, outlining the motivating factors within the charitable food system that prompted the emergence of RTF activism in the DTES. This chapter follows how people in the DTES understand and practice the concept of RTF within the broader context of entrenched poverty and growing inequality in the city. It looks at some of the community-level initiatives of DTES activists and then zooms out to look at some of the challenges and opportunities for building an RTF movement in Vancouver and beyond.

Chapter five concludes the thesis with a discussion of the results. It focuses on three areas of the RTF activism in the DTES, integrating the conceptual lens of RTC to provide an analysis of the challenges faced within this work and how it might be strengthened. The chapter picks up on how rights are understood by people within the RTF movement and points to the radical

conceptualization of rights in RTC as a possible pathway toward scaling up RTF and confronting the structural factors that underpin food insecurity.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter will expand on the key concepts and context that form the basis of this thesis. It situates the issue of food insecurity in Canada in the broader context of shifting modes of governance, highlighting how geographers have begun to explore the connections between food and theories of spatial justice in cities. Divided into four sections, the chapter will outline how neoliberal shifts in governance have been responsible for the increasing incidence of food insecurity (Section 2.1), the rise of charitable food provision (Section 2.2) and the consequent organization around both the community food security paradigm (Section 2.3) and the right to food (RTF; Section 2.4) as efforts to confront injustice in food systems. I will then explain how the issue of food insecurity is manifest spatially in an urban context (Section 2.5), how the resurgence of interest in theorizing about the right to the city is relevant to concerns about urban food systems (Section 2.6) and finally the historical and present day context of the Downtown Eastside in Vancouver, the case-study location of this thesis. Overall, this chapter will provide the theoretical background and justification for this research.

2.1 The modern welfare state and the neoliberal turn in Canada

In his examination of the evolving role of RTF in Canada, Robertson (1989) pointed out that charity has historically been accepted in Canada as an appropriate response to social issues including homelessness and food insecurity. Prior to the Second World War, private charity was the primary mechanism to address the needs of the poor, with minimal government involvement in the provision of social services. During the Depression, widespread food insecurity, public unrest and malnutrition revealed the limitations of charities in dealing with large scale

emergencies as long bread lines and demands for greater government assistance became commonplace across Canada. The legacy of these struggles and the economic boom in the post-war era resulted in the establishment of the modern welfare state, which saw the government take on a much larger role in the provision of social services to meet the basic needs of Canadian citizens (Robertson 1989). The introduction of the Canada Assistance Plan (CAP) by the federal government in 1966 further bolstered Canada's social safety net through a cost sharing agreement between Federal and Provincial governments, explicitly recognizing food, clothing and shelter as basic human needs (Rideout et al. 2007).

In the late 1970s and early 80s, a global shift toward neoliberal governance brought about a set of political and economic perspectives and practices in Canada that had profound effects at local levels, including on access to food in urban areas. Harvey (2005) has described how the 'neoliberal turn' engendered an approach to governance that advanced strict private property rights, competition and free markets with minimal state intervention as the best way to support social welfare. The rescaling of government roles and responsibilities led to the emergence of supra- and sub-national scales of governance as important arenas of influence on the socio-spatial transformation of cities (Martin, McCann & Purcell 2003). In response to the retrenchment of public finance, municipal level governments became more involved in interspatial competition and place marketing to generate economic growth (Peck, Theodore & Brenner 2009). In Vancouver for example, the process of neoliberalization has manifest itself in a variety of ways, one of which has been the increasing involvement of local government in the privatization and development of land for real estate. Over time, the aggregate effects of the neoliberal turn in Canada included a pronounced change in labour markets and the increasing

privatization of land and social services. This period also provoked a cultural shift in which an ethic of ‘self help’ and personal responsibility replaced the expectation of government responsibility for public welfare (Guthman 2008b).

The evolving political, economic and cultural environment in the neoliberal era has had significant impacts on food provision and access in Canada. One of these impacts was the dismantling of CAP in 1996 and its replacement with a block-funding scheme for health and social services. This resulted in the reduction of Federal transfer payments as well as the removal of cost sharing and other conditions that had been put in place to ensure provincial government accountability. Through this process, the explicit acknowledgement of food as a basic human need was removed from social policy (Rideout et al 2007). With smaller budgets and more control over social spending, provincial governments made reductions to welfare entitlements and introduced stringent eligibility requirements. In their examination of neoliberalism and devolution in Canada, McBride and McNutt (2007) point to the fact that, after 1996, the social wage was progressively reduced in British Columbia while benefit entitlements became increasingly tied to labour market participation. The dissolution of Canada’s social safety net has clear implications for community-level access to food and one very visible example of this has been the entrenchment of emergency and charitable food provision for low-income communities.

2.2 Charitable food and the social construction of hunger

Initially intended to be a temporary response to the unstable economic conditions brought about by a recession in the early 1980s, the charitable food sector has become an entrenched feature of the contemporary urban landscape. The incidence of food insecurity and need for emergency

food has continued to rise among socio-economically marginalized populations as access to food has become increasingly tied to obtaining an adequate income (Wakefield 2012). The charitable food sector includes food banks as well as free snack and meal programs that are provided through shelters, non-profit organizations or church programs. Uneven economic growth in Canada since the late 1990s has only increased the demand for charitable food and since the 2008 recession, food banks have seen a significant increase in users across Canada. In British Columbia, there was an overall 20% increase in food bank use between 2008 and 2013 (HungerCount 2013). The reason for this sustained demand has been linked by scholars to persistent poverty and underemployment, largely attributed to the low wages, reduced social safety net and decreases in affordable housing brought about by the neoliberal turn (Tarasuk 2001, Rideout et al. 2007, McBride & McNutt 2007).

One important aspect of the entrenchment of the charitable food sector was the way that this process was responsible for the social construction of ‘hunger’ as a prominent issue. In *Sweet Charity? Emergency Food and the End of Entitlement*, Poppendieck (1999) examines the rise of charitable food provision in the United States through the 1980s and early 90s. Importantly, she points out that for organizations with limited resources, it was easier to engage in the provision of emergency food than shelter, which led to hunger being bracketed from the issues underpinning food insecurity such as income inequality and the lack of affordable housing. As ‘anti-hunger’ networks and organizations proliferated, the public came to understand hunger as a ‘food problem’ that could consequently be solved through the provision of food (Tarasuk 2001). One critical dimension of this framing was the role of the media in promoting the work of charitable organizations. In Canada, Riches (2002) has highlighted the way that the Canadian

Broadcasting Corporation has been involved in the sponsorship of food drives for local food banks. Focusing on the isolated issue of hunger rather than its underlying structural causes has also supported the reduced role of government and effectively framed food insecurity as a depoliticized, individual problem, rather than a matter of distributive justice (Riches 1997). It is this interplay between grassroots anti-hunger activism, mainstream media and government retrenchment that have co-constructed hunger as the focal point of an ongoing 'emergency' and legitimized the institutionalization of charitable food provision for vulnerable communities (Poppendieck 1999). Despite the fact that many working within the charitable food sector have an awareness of the structural issues that perpetuate food insecurity, these organizations are limited in their ability to advocate for change due to their financial dependence on the state (Heynen 2010).

2.3 Emergence of the 'food movement': The community food security paradigm

In the late 1990s, concerns about increasing food insecurity, the inadequacy of the emergency food response and deepening corporate control over the food system engendered a movement that saw the convergence of disparate groups around the issue of food. Community food security (CFS) is a paradigm within the food movement that is comprised of a wide range of initiatives and activities using a 'community-development' approach with the stated goal of finding longer-term solutions to food insecurity. This approach involves and unites actors and organizations from a cross section of sectors including social services, emergency food programs, social justice, and agriculture. Initiatives within CFS are typically framed as health promotion strategies that focus on self-help or mutual support, including community gardens, community kitchens or farmer's markets in underserved communities (Tarasuk 2001, Wakefield 2012). Critical geographers have examined and problematized the notions of community self-reliance and local

food that tend to accompany CFS initiatives, challenging the assumption that such ideas are inherently socially just (Bedore 2010). CFS, and more broadly the ‘alternative’ food movement, has been criticized for assuming white, middle-class values (Slocum 2007; Guthman 2008a) that reinforce neoliberal subjectivities by emphasizing individual self-help and relying on market-based solutions (Pudup 2008; Alkon & Mares 2012) and for ignoring the structural causes of hunger (Tarasuk 2001).

Guthman (2008b) explains that as food has emerged as a site of politics through which to resist or challenge the influences of neoliberalization on the food system, the neoliberal economic project has at the same time imposed limits on the ‘politics of the possible’. She argues that contemporary food activism which seeks to undermine the capitalist, corporatized food system can have the tendency of reproducing “neoliberal forms and spaces of governance” (1172) in the way that it privileges individual consumer choice and market mechanisms as a means to promote justice. This can have the effect of further depoliticizing the issue of food insecurity and facilitating the withdrawal of state responsibility for meeting the basic needs of citizens.

2.4 The right to food in Canada

Scholars and activists in Canada who have examined the growing problem of food insecurity among Canadians often point to the fact that Canada is a signatory on numerous international agreements that support the right to food (RTF), including the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948 and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) in 1976 (Rideout et al 2007). Graham Riches, who began examining food insecurity as byproduct of welfare reform in the 1980s, was one of the first to begin advancing the idea that

the production of hunger and concomitant reliance on a model of emergency food provision must be framed as a violation of Canada's many international commitments to ensure RTF. In *First World Hunger* (1997), Riches argues the use of the human rights discourse reasserts food insecurity as a political issue stemming from the inequitable and unjust distribution of resources. He maintains that notions of rights are capable of uniting a fragmented "politics of difference" (76), by strategically bringing together actors and organizations with diverse perspectives and aims through the common goals of social justice.

Rights that are ratified by countries at the international scale require corresponding national legislation in order to be justiciable. Advocates of RTF make the normative claim that local, provincial and federal levels of government are responsible for ensuring that all citizens are able to access an adequate standard of food. 25 years ago, Robertson (1990) argued that RTF has languished in Canada due to a lack of political will to reflect this right in Canadian law or constitution. As such, RTF has been opaquely defined in terms of both the content of the right as well as the roles and responsibilities of state bodies to fulfill it, leaving scholars to establish a clear definition. Drawing on commonly cited UN documents, Robertson defined RTF as:

...a condition in which each person can eat food which, by prevailing medical standards, is judged adequate for the full realization of physical and mental health. A person's diet should also consist of food which satisfies cultural preferences. The food should be obtainable in a manner which is not an affront to the dignity or self-esteem of the person. The process by which the food is made available should be stable and sustainable, thus ensuring continuing access to food of acceptable standards.

The emphasis placed on individual food security within this definition supports Kuymulu's (2013) claim that the rights discourse has been embedded in a liberal tradition of dominant

individualism, as it separates the issue of food access from circumstances of food production as well as the social and political contexts in which food is obtained (Patel et al. 2007).

2.5 Food and spatial justice in the city

Space, as it is understood in the field of critical geography, is not merely a container or backdrop against which the activities of social reproduction take place. Rather, space plays an active and dialectical role in the constitution and reproduction of social life, both shaping and being shaped by innumerable social and political processes. The production of uneven or unjust geographies is therefore an outcome of how unequal relations of power are productive of as well as supported by the built environment. The pursuit of critical spatial justice is to examine the forces responsible in the genesis of uneven geographies in an effort to identify more equitable alternatives (Soja 2010).

It is important to understand the integral role of urbanization to modern capitalism in order to understand how spatial inequities are produced and maintained in cities. Over the last century urbanization has replaced industrialization as a force of production that can support the continuous extraction, circulation and accumulation of capital through major infrastructural projects as well as real estate investment and speculation. Through this process of spatial commodification, urban land has come to be seen for its profit generating potential, also known as its exchange value (Merrifield 2002). Cities are tied up in a cyclical process that alternately works to preserve the exchange value of space or destroy the value of investments in order to create new spaces for capital accumulation in the ongoing pursuit of profit. In this way, urbanization has become a 'spatial fix' to resolve the internal contradictions of capitalism which result in crises of overaccumulation and surplus absorption (Soja 2010, Harvey 2013).

Soja (2010) explains that the distributional inequality of goods and services vital to public health, including food, is a geographical outcome of the production of spatial inequality occurring in all modern cities built upon the foundation of a private property ownership model. The decisions made about the spatial layout of cities by capitalist class interests, including the geographical movement of capital and labour, come at the expense of low-income and otherwise marginalized groups, which serves to perpetuate class inequality and distributive injustice. Issues surrounding access to food thus have to do both with the economic barriers produced by the erosion of the welfare state as well as the physical location of food resources in cities and the tendency for low-income areas to be underserved, with the lowest level of access to nutritious and affordable food (Larsen & Gilliland 2008).

The gradual consolidation and corporatization of the food retail industry is tied to processes of capitalist urbanization and has played a role in the production of uneven urban food geographies. Bedore (2013) has examined the changes in food retail spatiality in Canadian cities in the 1980s and 90s as a result of innovations in food production and processing as well as the globalization of the food retail sector, leading to the rescaling and consolidation of major food retailers. The mass production of consumer goods as well as trends in urban planning favouring a separation between commercial and residential areas brought about the chain store retail model, resulting in larger and fewer food retail stores being located in suburban areas. The ultimate effect of these developments was that the food retail industry followed broader patterns of capital accumulation and investment that saw commercial withdrawal from inner-city areas and the production of economic disadvantage and class segregation in cities.

An examination of inequities in the urban food system, such as the uneven geography of food access, leads us to discover how power, control and inequality are manifest spatially (Block et al. 2011) Bedore (2010) suggests that the ideas that have developed over decades of theorizing about the just city can aid in an understanding of how to create a more equitable food system, which necessitates a greater level of citizen democratic control over the food system as well as finding ways to address the structural factors that produce injustice. Theories of spatial justice fundamentally call into question the capacity of capital to provide the transformative changes needed for the equitable redistribution of essential goods and services. Specifically, Bedore proposes that focusing on the role of public/private property and ownership dynamics as well as ideas about what is meant by the ‘just city’ will help us move toward a critically grounded advancement of justice in the food system. Interrogating the ways in which capitalist urbanization has produced an unjust food system and how government policies support the interests of the private sector provokes the question of how a more equitable food system might be advanced at a grassroots level.

2.6 Critical geography and the right to the city

As neoliberal approaches to governing have taken hold, cities around the world have witnessed increasing privatization and the loss of public space (Mayer 2009). These processes have had significant impacts not only on those who are ‘immediately deprived’ of their basic needs such as food and shelter but also the ‘culturally alienated’, who have their material needs met but are excluded from the creative and social opportunities that they desire for satisfaction and fulfillment in life (Marcuse 2009). Harvey (2013) has argued that as the primary sites of capital

accumulation and investment, cities embody the social and material inequalities inherent in capitalism. Low-income populations are especially vulnerable, experiencing the simultaneous exploitation of their labour, both on the productive side through low-wage insecure employment, and on the consumptive side through exploitive rents, food, transportation, and other ‘basic needs’ costs, making it nearly impossible to meet needs such as food and shelter. First introduced by Lefebvre (1968), the right to the city (RTC) has in recent years been taken up by many critical urban scholars who have observed the changing trajectories of urbanization under the influences of neoliberal economic policies and modes of governance. Neoliberalized cities assume some shared characteristics, including the destruction of working class neighbourhoods through market-driven revitalization strategies, increased privatization and surveillance of urban space and the expansion of spaces dedicated to elite consumption habits. In response to neoliberalization, cities have become sites of perpetual contestation. RTC scholars seek to describe how the spatial arrangement of urban centres is marked by ongoing struggles between those who seek to profit from the exchange value of urban space and those whose everyday lived experiences in these locations motivate them to defend the areas to which they feel entitled (Harvey 2013).

As conceived by recent theorists, RTC is a collective right that belongs to all urban inhabitants, and one that is inspired by contemporary urban struggles. As a theory, RTC helps to illuminate the conditions under which urban citizens have been alienated from urban life. As a movement, RTC represents the potential for re-imagining the right of urban residents to determine how space is produced and used in the city, as well as the right to occupy and not be alienated from spaces of everyday life. (Purcell 2002; Harvey 2013). Claiming RTC necessitates wresting the

power over the production of space and social life from the capitalist class, with cities serving as the focal points of this action. The emphasis on collective action within RTC is an intentional response to the individualizing discourses of human rights outlined above.

RTC has experienced a resurgence in popularity among academics and activists, particularly in the wake of widespread, urban-based movements such as ‘Occupy’ that, through a tactic of physical occupation, have sought to re-appropriate public space, thereby attempting to radically redefine and change the terms of democracy (Harvey 2013; Iveson 2013). The concept is often understood as not only the claiming of rights *in* the city, such as the basic rights to housing and food, but also the right to *recreate* the city according to the terms of those who inhabit it rather than those who profit from it, which signifies more transformative changes to physical and social urban environments (Shillington 2013). Implementing RTC as a transformative idea to radically change the urban landscape by means of a revolutionary politics provides a useful platform from which to interpret the multi-scalar mobilizations of local food activisms. For example, movements that seek to advance RTF by addressing the structural causes of hunger might be seen as one practical avenue for RTC mobilization if it can engage meaningfully with the socio-spatial inequity perpetuated by modern capitalist urbanization.

Recent work around urban resistance has been fruitful in this regard (Harvey 2012; Eizenburg 2012; Sumner 2011; Maringanti 2011). Through RTC, the urban commons can be not understood only as fixed physical spaces but as a crucial leveraging point for radical politics into urbanization itself – a symbolic “space of hope” for disparate political groups to find common ground in re-envisioning the city (Harvey 2013). In exploring conflicts surrounding urban land

use and opposition to private development, the idea of the urban commons emerges as local residents tend to assert a collective sense of ownership over space and space-making processes that has been produced through shared labour or struggle (Blomley 2003; Eizenburg 2012). The urban commons has therefore become a way to challenge the dominant paradigm of the private ownership model in cities, making it a useful tool in understanding how urban inhabitants might realize RTC by confronting such models.

As some have noted, the proliferation of RTC theorizing in recent years has made an important contribution by identifying the failures of the neoliberal city but has had less success in advancing practical alternatives (Purcell 2013). Recently, Shillington (2013) and Purcell (2014) have made efforts to ground the theory in empirical examples by examining how urban food-centered initiatives such as urban farming might be interpreted through the lens of the RTC. The authors argue that food production, as an example of urban inhabitants finding ways to produce and manage space in the city for themselves, can in some cases be considered a radical act to resist exclusion from ‘urban spatial practices’ (Shillington 2013) as well as that it can produce ‘spaces of encounter’ where people may develop alternative ways of living together in the city (Purcell 2014). These analyses of urban food initiatives offer compelling ideas of how RTC might be realized ‘on the ground’ as urban inhabitants claim their right to occupy and use space in the city and develop alternative socio-spatial relations through the everyday practices of producing and consuming food.

2.7 The Downtown Eastside: history and present context

It is not possible to fully appreciate the current situation in the DTES without acknowledging the historical context in which the neighbourhood is embedded and the many stories of dispossession and displacement that have taken place within this particular geography. The DTES is a community in which residents' disenfranchisement from their rights to the city is highly visible, severe, and long-standing (Linden et al. 2012; Pederson & Swanson 2010). For over a century, Vancouver's growth and evolution has been predicated upon repeating cycles of colonization and dispossession committed in the name of nation building, national security, transportation efficiency, public safety, crime reduction, and most recently social regeneration. At the same time, the DTES has a long history of resistance to disenfranchisement, as generations of inhabitants have demonstrated an ability to organize successfully against political power as well as implement projects to reclaim the community (Masuda & Crabtree 2010; Pederson & Swanson 2009).

Today the DTES is typically recognized as being home to a high concentration of individuals dealing with various mental and physical health issues including addictions, HIV/AIDS and diabetes, many of whom are also living in abject material poverty brought about by histories of colonization, marginalization and inadequate or insufficient social supports (Miewald et al. 2010; Campbell et al. 2009). The DTES, and in particular the area known as the Downtown Eastside/Oppenheimer District is one of few areas in Vancouver with non-market rate housing due in large part to the abundance of single room occupancy (SRO) hotels located in the neighbourhood, most built by Japanese Canadians to house much of the racialized labour force of Vancouver and the broader West Coast resource sector over the first decades of the 20th

century (Kobayashi 1992). After Japanese Canadians were uprooted in WWII, this purpose-built infrastructure for the transient suddenly came available to new property owners who took advantage of severely discounted prices and created rooming houses for a new population.

There has been a steady and accelerating loss of this type of housing over the last several years, partly due to efforts to re-invent these hotels within revitalization schemes and partly out of an implicit policy of dispersal in much of planning, housing, and public health sectors. Since the mid-1990s, the area has seen high levels of homelessness as emergency shelters are routinely full and the demand for affordable housing continues. There is also evidence to suggest that many of the existing SROs in the neighbourhood are inadequate and unsafe for residents. There are a number of ways that these issues surrounding housing affect the ability for residents of the DTES to have regular access to sufficient nutrition. Privately owned SROs often charge above the amount that is allocated for shelter by welfare rates, meaning that residents dependent on social assistance will cut into their budget for other necessities including food (Campbell et al. 2009; CCAP 2010). In addition, SROs – recalling their original purpose to house Japanese labourers with a more collective culture and lifestyle – tend to lack cooking facilities and space for food storage, making it difficult for residents to prepare food at home (Barbolet 2005). This lack of purchasing power and resources for food preparation makes many members of the DTES community reliant on prepared meals from restaurants or charitable food providers.

In a study conducted by Barbolet et al. in 2005, it was found that of the approximately 100 charitable food resources in Vancouver, the majority of them were located in the DTES, including food banks and other organizations providing free and low cost meals and meal

programs through shelters. Through these organizations, approximately 5,000 to 6,000 meals are distributed each day with the greatest number being delivered through the Dugout, Carnegie Community Centre and Evelyn Saller, all organizations located in the DTES. Many residents of the DTES rely on the charitable food sector, which can result in micronutrient deficiencies due to the lack of fresh produce that is available. This is particularly an issue for people with compromised immune systems, such as individuals living with HIV, for whom inadequate nutrition can exacerbate health complications and lead to increased rates of mortality (Miewald et al. 2010; Anema et al. 2013). As Miewald (2013) points out, although the DTES may not fit within the conventional definition of a ‘food desert’ – a concept used by food geographers to illustrate the lack of access in low-income areas to grocery stores and nutritious food – access to adequate and culturally appropriate nutrition amidst the plethora of free food programs is a commonly identified issue in the neighbourhood.

2.7.1 Policy-driven socio-spatial polarization in the DTES

Inner-city ‘revitalization’ strategies have come into favour in municipal planning, intended to promote gentrification and attract the middle class to low income neighbourhoods, showcasing affordable prices and the opportunity to realize capital gains on newly available properties. These strategies aim to market cities as safe and livable, advancing the idea that the ‘social mix’ of income levels and ethnic backgrounds will promote social inclusion and alleviate the ‘problems’ that stem from concentrated poverty (Walks & Maaranen 2008). In practice, in the absence of Federal and Provincial governmental support for social housing, market-led gentrification has been shown to create higher levels of social polarization and conflict in Canadian cities,

dispelling the myth that ‘social mix’ revitalization strategies will lead to greater social inclusion (Walks 2009).

In the DTES, municipal policy has contributed to socio-spatial polarization, particularly through the designation of heritage status for Gastown in the 1970s. The city has supported commercial- and residential-driven revitalization efforts in this area which has led to a stark juxtaposition between the adjacent neighbourhoods of Gastown and the Oppenheimer District, and contributes to the current pressures of gentrification in a part of the city that is the most in need of low-income social housing (Smith 2002). The ethic of the neoliberal city, including the valorization of property interests, consumerism, entrepreneurialism, and primacy of exchange value over use value, has been demonstrated through a number of initiatives at the municipal level, including Expo 86 and the more recent 2010 Olympic games. Both events have had a pronounced effect on the development trajectory of the neighbourhood, which Schatz (2010) argues has made life more difficult for residents of the DTES who were subject to increased rents, displacement, policing and criminalization as the city prepared to host the events.

More recently, and provoked by an agenda of “revitalization without displacement” (Ley & Dobson 2008), the city undertook a Local Area Planning Process (LAPP) for the DTES. This project brought together a cross-section of community stakeholders with the goal of developing a 30-year ‘revitalization’ plan for the area, made up of all the subdivided neighbourhoods including Gastown, Strathcona and the Oppenheimer District. The draft plan, approved in March 2014 by City Council, has intensified concerns that the low-income community will continue to experience marginalization and displacement due to the perceived inadequacy of the affordable

social housing provisions put forward in the approved LAPP report (Wallstam, Markle & Crompton 2014). A social impact assessment conducted as part of the LAPP indicated that between the years 2000 and 2012 the property values in the DTES, like the city of Vancouver as a whole, increased by 300%. The new developments encroaching on the neighbourhood have ignited fears of residents that the process of gentrification and associated increases in rents will make it impossible for them to afford their homes (COV 2014). In addition to displacement fears, many low-income DTES residents also feel that their sense of belonging to the neighbourhood is under threat as gentrification and neighbourhood upscaling have introduced new mechanisms of surveillance and exclusion of low-income people (Robertson 2007; Lupick 2014).

The DTES has become a significant space of consumption for middle- and high-income individuals who are attracted to the area's growing restaurant district. As 'foodie culture' has gained momentum in the neighbourhood, area residents have witnessed the disappearance of lower cost food retailers and the proliferation of "zones of exclusion" (Marquez et al. 2011) that are unwelcoming to poor residents (Miewald & McCann 2013). Meanwhile, Burnett (2013) has examined the way that new restaurants in the DTES, both a result and a mechanism of gentrification, have commodified the experiences of low-income community members by branding themselves an authentic and adventurous experience for privileged consumers from outside the neighbourhood, effectively developing a market for poverty tourism. This situation is illustrative of one of the many ways that food is tied into different social and economic processes taking place within the DTES.

2.7.2 Community-led resistance in the DTES

In the face of sustained oppression, the DTES has a long history of resistance, as generations of inhabitants have organized repeatedly against political power through projects that have attempted to reclaim the community from those who would undermine it (Pederson & Swanson 2009). For example, neighbourhood sites such as the former Woodward's department store, CRAB Park and Oppenheimer Park have been crucial physical as well as symbolic spaces for political protests and for advocacy campaigns for specific human rights (Aoki 2011; Masuda & Crabtree 2010; Blomley 2003).

Woodward's department store, a neighbourhood institution on Hastings, closed in the early 1990s, as consumers increasingly favoured indoor shopping malls and the primary shopping district moved west toward downtown. When a developer purchased the Woodward's property in 1995, many in the neighbourhood organized to protest the perceived threat of market rate housing and anticipated gentrification in an area that desperately needed more affordable housing for low-income individuals. Blomley (2003) describes the struggle for Woodward's, in which activists were successful in having non-market units included in the redevelopment plan, as an example of how the DTES community feels a sense of ownership over sites and spaces in the neighbourhood that is antithetical to traditional ideas about private property ownership.

The idea of the urban commons has been invoked through these struggles in the way that activists have challenged the dominant private property model by asserting collective claims to local properties and public spaces. These claims imply community ownership by virtue of the investments that residents have made through long-term physical occupation, labour and ongoing political struggle (Blomley 2003). It is this collective sense of entitlement to space in the DTES

that has led Blomley (2003; 2008) to argue that the definition of the urban commons not be limited by traditional notions of public/private property.

The nascent RTF activism in the DTES, a recent example that picks up on this legacy of community-led resistance, has endeavored to both improve food provisioning practices in the neighbourhood as well as create change on a more systemic and structural level. However, the organizations leading this effort face constraints in terms of funding, raising questions about their capacity to actually create the fundamental changes needed to realize RTF in the DTES (Miewald & McCann 2013). The topic of food has been shown to intersect with multiple issues, including human rights struggles, contestations over property ownership, competing discourses and political mobilization efforts. Therefore, any attempts to claim the RTF for residents of the DTES will have to connect to these broader, multi-scalar issues in order to have a meaningful impact. This thesis presents a case study of contemporary activism in order to explore both the constraints and promise of this work, using the theoretical lens of RTC to understand how to support and build a RTF movement in the DTES.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

3.1 Community entry

I began my project in the spring of 2013 after living in Vancouver for five months. I had temporarily relocated from Winnipeg at the beginning of the year to take a class at UBC as part of my master's coursework. While enrolled in the class, I found out about the DTES NH and their food-centred initiatives. I quickly became interested in the work of the organization, which aligned closely with my research interests, and began having conversations with staff about having the DTES NH serve as the site of my thesis research. What was intended to be a short stay in Vancouver turned into almost two years in the city as I built relationships in the community and undertook my research project.

I started volunteering at the DTES NH by attending meetings for the Farm Bund, a group of DTES residents, DTES NH staff and volunteers who were eager to talk about and plan gardening projects in the neighbourhood. I also became a contributor to the DTES NH Right to Food (RTF) zine, a quarterly publication led by volunteers, which ran articles pertaining to food justice at the local and global scale. Over the spring, I developed a rapport with the staff and community volunteers and became involved in additional projects, including a community food assessment led by the former Executive Director and the two nutritional outreach programs, Banana Beat and the Mobile Smoothie Project.

I also formed a relationship with the Kitchen Tables Project and volunteered to update their Community Food Access Map. The Kitchen Tables Project is an initiative that is closely tied, both organizationally and philosophically to the DTES NH and was also included in my case study. The early connections that I made with people working and living in the DTES were a tremendous asset in helping me develop my research proposal as well as identify people who would be interested in doing key informant interviews. In the late spring, I defended my research proposal and submitted my ethics protocol for approval (see Appendix A).

At the same time that I became involved at the DTES NH and Kitchen Tables Project, I developed an association through my thesis supervisor with a research project based in the DTES called *Revitalizing Japantown? A Unifying Exploration of Human Rights, Branding and Place* (hereinafter referred to as “RJ”). Researchers with RJ were working with local partners in an effort to situate present-day human rights struggles in the DTES in the context of the neighbourhood’s longer historical legacy of colonialism, racialization, displacement, and human rights violations. Given that I was framing my project around perceived violations of RTF and concomitant organizational responses undertaken by community leaders, there was a natural overlap between the two studies. My affiliation with the RJ project helped to situate me in the community by giving me invaluable connections with long-time community members as well as access to office space where I held most of my research interviews. As a graduate student researcher with RJ, I participated in a community advisory gathering that brought together a cross-section of community partners and representatives with the intention of reporting back preliminary findings of RJ and engaging attendees in a discussion about future directions and goals of the project. Through this event, I was given the opportunity to deliver a presentation of

my research aims and initial findings, allowing me to speak to and receive feedback from a broad audience of people with long-standing ties to the community. Additionally, my affiliation with RJ gave me access to a research contact who organized and provided translation for the focus groups and interviews with Chinese elders.

3.2 Methodological justification

This project was guided by a critical ethnographic approach, a method of cultural inquiry that examines the ways that knowledge and power are connected, contextualizing observations of on the ground realities within broader social structures. As a researcher, I am motivated by a desire to understand the structural roots of social inequities and firmly believe that this kind of work is needed to understand and address oppression. Critical ethnography is not necessarily incongruent with traditional ethnographic approaches but is considered a more reflective approach within this field of inquiry, one that prompts the researcher to “locate the meaning of events within the context of asymmetrical power relations” (Thomas 2003, 46). This approach was meaningful to me as critical social theory is at the core of this project and throughout my fieldwork I was attentive to how I could apply theoretical insights to my observations in the field.

The act of positioning myself in a close working relationship with members of the community gave me deeper insights into the research setting than would have been possible through conventional research approaches. Despite the advantages of using a community-based approach, there is also a particular concern for researchers to think reflexively about their position in the research and critically examine how this can influence the research process and outcome (Shehata 2006). Throughout the research process I kept a detailed journal about my activities and

observations, which encouraged me to continually reflect on my role in the project. I will expand on this further in section 3.3.

3.3 Ethical considerations

I took several steps to ensure the safety and confidentiality of my research participants. First, I completed a course on research ethics and received a certificate through the Canadian Panel on Research Ethics (TCPS 2: Tri-Council policy statement on ethical conduct for research involving humans – See Appendix B). Second, I submitted my ethics protocol to the University of Manitoba Research Ethics Board (REB) in September 2013. At the request of the REB, I made minor changes to my protocol and commenced my research after receiving approval to proceed. Finally, at the community level, DTES NH staff members were given the opportunity to review my research proposal to ensure that it aligned with the interests and values of the organization. I had a meeting with one staff member who approved my proposal as well as gave me feedback on my research design. This feedback pertained to the scope of some of my proposed activities and was particularly helpful in prompting me to refine some of my loftier research goals to make them feasible given my proposed timeline.

Honoraria are widely used, but somewhat contentious aspect of research that involves community participants. Honoraria are frequently used to acknowledge the value of participant's time, however the offer of an incentive for participation is seen by some as a method of coercion, particularly when participants have a low income (Grant & Sugarman 2004). I ultimately chose to not provide honoraria for interview participants, primarily due to limited resources in the project. To show my appreciation for interviewees' time I provided a snack and coffee or tea during each interview. Participants were made aware of their ability to terminate and leave the

interview at any time in the event of emotional distress without facing any negative consequences, though no participant chose to do so. Participants were given the option to choose the location for the interview to facilitate comfort and convenience. All interviews were audio recorded and transcribed verbatim, and interviewees were given the option to review and make changes to their interview transcripts. The majority of interviewees did not request for any changes to be made with the exception of a few who made changes to details such as dates and names.

The roundtable discussion with interview participants presented new ethical considerations, as attendance at the event would compromise the anonymity of interviewees. In the event invitation, I explained to participants that their attendance would indicate to others their identity as a key informant in the project but that confidentiality would be maintained by removing identifying information in the data presented. An amended letter of informed consent reflecting these changes was submitted to and approved by the REB (see Appendix C).

3.4 Procedures

I chose to frame this research as a case study of the RTF movement in the DTES with a focus on the DTES NH as one of the primary organizations promoting a RTF philosophy through its work. This idea came about and took shape organically through informal conversations with volunteers and staff at the DTES NH. I used a mixed methods approach in order to support rigor and allow for triangulation in my data collection and analysis. I combined data from a wide range of sources in order to capture a holistic picture of the contemporary RTF movement and its

genesis in the DTES. Data sources included a textual analysis, one-on-one interviews, focus groups, and field journal notes, each described in detail below.

3.4.1 Textual analysis

The study of texts in qualitative research can provide a way to gain insight into social life as it is mediated through text (Peräkylä & Ruusuvuori 2011). As a preliminary stage to gain a broader picture of how issues surrounding food are described in relation to the DTES, I began with a search of newspaper articles between the years 2000 – 2012. The purpose of my textual analysis was to contextualize my contemporary research in the broader picture of how food insecurity and efforts to address hunger have been discursively represented and identify the factors that prompted the emergence of community organizing around the RTF paradigm.

Using the Canadian Newsstand Database, I entered the keywords ‘food’ and ‘Downtown Eastside’ and collected 137 articles from local and national mainstream newspaper sources including primarily *The Vancouver Sun*, *The Province* and *The Globe and Mail*. I read through each article and selected articles for analysis based on whether they had a direct reference to food production, provision or consumption in the DTES neighbourhood. Common themes that fell within this criteria were profiles of the work of food-serving charitable organizations, urban farming in the neighbourhood and new restaurants opening in the area, particularly after 2009. After applying my inclusion criteria I was left with 97 articles to analyze. I read through each article, making memos and highlighting words and phrases that represented how food was being ‘framed’ in the article. I recorded the date, newspaper source, general topic, the social agents quoted in the article, a description of the content and my own notes on different themes that were

emerging. Finally, I grouped articles by theme and time period, inputting this information into a chart (Appendix D). The purpose of this activity was to see a ‘snapshot’ of the recent trends, framing and dominant narratives of food and food insecurity within a defined time period.

In addition to the mainstream newspaper articles, I also collected articles from ‘alternative’ news sources such as *The Tyee* to compare how food was discursively represented in this media. I reviewed materials produced by the Kitchen Tables Project and the Downtown Eastside Neighbourhood House as well as the 2013 Vancouver Food Strategy published by the City of Vancouver.

3.4.2 Participation in the research setting

In order to build relationships as well as gather participant observation data in the research setting, I worked as a volunteer over 10 months for several projects in and related to the DTES NH. I was a regular volunteer for both nutritional outreach programs, I contributed articles and provided organizational support for the RTF ‘zine and I helped out occasionally in the community kitchen and drop-in kitchen programs. Through the Kitchen Tables Project, I helped update their Community Food Access map by contacting food providers in the community and compiling current information on the times, days and other details about the provision of free and low cost meals in the DTES. Additionally, I participated in a number of community events, such as the Powell Street Festival, the 2014 HomeGround event, and an anti-poverty rally organized by Raise the Rates on World Food Day. On average, I was at the DTES NH at least once a week over the course of my research.

The advantages to my role as a community-situated researcher were twofold. First, my regular presence in the community facilitated relationship building with DTES NH staff, volunteers and community members. My demonstrated interest in making a practical contribution through volunteering was an important aspect of gaining the trust and respect of staff at the organization, which enabled me to comfortably proceed with my research. Second, my ongoing involvement in RTF projects gave me personal insight into the work underway in the community, which assisted me throughout the processes of data collection and interpretation. I was able to draw on my experiences and relationships in the community during my research interviews, which created deeper connections with interviewees, yielding better data. In many cases, I had spent a significant amount of time with participants prior to the interview while volunteering for the DTES NH or other projects in the neighbourhood. This gave me some background on many participants and so I was able to ask about specific topics that I may not have had knowledge of without the existing relationship.

3.4.3 Key Stakeholder Interviews

I recruited interviewees through a process of purposeful sampling (Coyne 1997). I began by speaking to people with whom I had a pre-existing relationship and who were involved with the DTES NH, RTF or food related issues in the neighbourhood. Because my project was a case study of the work being done primarily by the DTES NH and Kitchen Tables Project, I wanted to start by interviewing those who were closely affiliated with these organizations (staff and volunteers) and then more broadly contextualize their perspectives by interviewing past employees, other service providers in the community and as well as at the municipal level, particularly the Vancouver Food Policy council. During the interviews, I asked participants if

they knew of anyone who would be interested in sitting down for an interview with me, and I was connected with one of my interviewees this way. In all other cases, I was familiar enough with the participants to approach them directly for an interview. I contacted specific people not only because of our existing relationship but because they represented a broad spectrum of experience with RTF and the work of the DTES NH. Interviewees included people who have accessed the services and programs provided by the DTES NH and other organizations in the community (N= 3), individuals who work or volunteer at the organization (some of whom also accessed community services) (N= 13), other service providers in the community (N= 3), and one interviewee who worked with food policy at the municipal level. This wide range of perspectives allowed me to capture a snapshot of the numerous activities that are unfolding around RTF in the neighbourhood.

The interviews ranged from 38 to 88 minutes in length, with an average time of 60 minutes. Interviewees were given the option to select a location for the interview that was convenient and comfortable for them. In many cases, interviewees chose to come to my office space in the Japanese Language Hall, located one block north of the DTES NH. Other interviews were carried out at the DTES NH or other organizations in the community and in one case an interview took place in the home of the interviewee. It was advantageous for me to have a good rapport with the individuals due to our existing relationships (in most but not all cases). Interviewees were candid with me and at no point expressed discomfort or hesitation answering any of the questions. Some interviewees had previous experience being involved in academic research in some capacity, so this familiarity with the process likely made it more comfortable for them.

Interviews were semi-structured (Turner 2010), which meant that there was no set interview schedule, though I did have a list of questions that I used as a basis to guide discussions throughout the interview (Appendix A). I began with broad and open-ended questions and allowing interviewees to do most of the talking with the intent of eliciting an in-depth narrative detailing their experiences and perspectives. When I wanted to hear more about a specific topic I offered an occasional prompt or probe. As different themes emerged during the interview process, my questions became more directed toward particular topics.

Interviewee affiliations

A total of 17 one-on-one interviews were conducted with DTES NH staff and volunteers, DTES residents, workers in other DTES organizations and one member of the Vancouver Food Policy Council over a period of four months. Interviewees (10 women and 7 men) ranged in age from mid-20s to late 60s. The majority of interviewees had at least a post-secondary education. Recognizing the diverse ancestral backgrounds of DTES residents, I made an effort to capture a range of cultural perspectives though the majority of interviewees (12 out of 17) were of European ancestry, which is representative of the backgrounds of most of the staff at the DTES NH. Additionally, 3 focus groups were conducted through the RJ project with a total of 8 Chinese interviewees (5 women and 3 men) who either live or spend time in the DTES and access food through DTES organizations. Due to the small size of my sample and the high degree of familiarity that many people involved in the research study have with each other, for the purposes of protecting confidentiality I have excluded most identifying demographic information for each interviewee aside from their affiliation to the DTES NH or the DTES. The

pseudonyms and affiliations of interviewees are presented in a table in appendix E. It is important to note that the majority of my key stakeholder interviews were conducted with people who do not currently reside in the DTES. Many of these participants also have a post-secondary education. I cannot make the claim that my sample is representative of the neighbourhood, and the influence of these relatively privileged perspectives on the outcomes of my research are acknowledged and discussed in Chapters 4 and 5.

3.4.4 Focus groups

As I carried out my key stakeholder interviews I began to notice the absence of Chinese perspectives, particularly as many interviews addressed the topic of Chinese elders and food access in the DTES. I acknowledged that without attempting to include these perspectives, my project would risk reproducing the marginalization that Chinese elders experience in the wider community. My affiliation with the RJ project afforded me the opportunity to speak with small groups of Chinese community members in a focus group format on the subject of food. The theme of the focus groups was human rights in the DTES and so I was able to pose some questions to participants about their experiences accessing food in the neighbourhood and their thoughts about RTF. Two of the focus groups were conducted in Cantonese and required a translator and one was conducted primarily in English with the assistance of a translator. The interviews, lasting one hour each, were recorded and transcribed verbatim.

3.4.5 Roundtable discussion

In early February 2014, I completed my key informant interviews and was in the process of data analysis and interpretation. In the interest of sharing my early interpretations and receiving

commentary from key informants, I invited all research participants to a presentation and discussion at the DTES NH. Six interview participants attended the presentation as well as three other people involved in the work of the DTES NH who were interested in the research. I presented my preliminary findings and some quotes that helped to illustrate key themes. The group discussion was loosely based around these three questions that were posed to attendees at the conclusion of the presentation: (1) Do these results accurately represent the work being done in the DTES around RTF?; (2) Is there anything that you would add to these results?; and (3) What do you think the value of these findings are for the work that is currently underway around the RTF in the DTES? The discussion was guided by those in attendance, who each identified and responded to the points that stood out to them. Much of the discussion focused heavily on issues related to inadequate housing in the neighbourhood, supporting ideas that had emerged from my research that community members understood RTF to be more than a ‘food problem’. There was also some impassioned discussion among participants about the challenges that confronted them in their work within a struggling non-profit. Several participants commented after the roundtable discussion that the preliminary results would be useful to them in their work. Having research participants affirm and contribute to the interpretation of the findings in this way gave me confidence to move forward in my data analysis.

3.4.6 Journaling

The process of doing community-based qualitative research can be a messy as well as exhausting experience for the researcher, and I found this to be true throughout my project. As a way to process my experiences and work through ideas and tensions as they arose, I kept a detailed journal of my activities, observations and ideas throughout my entire research project. Journaling

is a useful activity in two important ways: first, it provokes researchers to be reflexive and ask questions in an attempt to understand their role in the research process; second, as identified by Charmaz (2006), journaling can be a useful tool in grounded theory to keep track of ideas as they emerge, which tend to become more analytical as interview data, observations and theories are compared and linked together. I wrote in my journal after every interview, taking note of observations I had made before, during and after the interview that would not have been captured by my audio recorder. I also wrote in my journal at least once a week to keep track of my activities at the DTES NH as well as my process of data analysis. I ended up with 52 typed pages and all entries were coded and analyzed alongside my interview data. My journal tracked the development of my ideas and my deepening involvement with the DTES NH. Through my journal, I confronted the challenges that I was facing both in conceptualizing a research project and in my position as a researcher in the community. Although I was never able to completely reconcile the sense of discomfort that arose from my multiple roles as an outsider, researcher, volunteer and friend of many of the people who I worked alongside and interviewed for my research, using a journal allowed me to work through these feelings in a way that was productive and led to new insights and perspectives.

Journaling was also an efficient way to keep track of my ideas and was a fundamental part of developing a theoretical framework as I continued to write in my journal regularly throughout different stages of data analysis. Throughout the coding process, I used my journal as a tool to make sense of how I was interpreting the data and developing themes. Journal entries in the initial stages of coding detail my sense of being overwhelmed by the vast number of codes I had generated and an unease that they would never come together in a coherent narrative. Through

journaling, I experimented with ideas and theories, making connections between different pieces of data (interviews, journal notes and textual data) and eventually establishing the themes that formed the basis of my thesis.

Journaling prompted me to maintain a critical point of view and ask myself questions about how I was interpreting the ideas and experiences that I encountered. In her analysis of practicing reflexivity in feminist research, Rose (1997) has described the impossibility of 'transparent reflexivity', which demands a separation between the researcher and her context in order to understand the production of power and knowledge in the research setting, despite the fact that such a separation would suggest the need for "an analytical certainty that is as insidious as the universalizing certainty that so many feminists have critiqued" (318). My efforts to explore how the different aspects of my positionality (particularly as a white, middle-class, university student conducting research in a socio-economically marginalized neighbourhood) influenced my relationships, interpretations and experiences revealed to me the murky and inconclusive nature of practicing reflexivity. Kobayashi (2010) has argued that the now popular exercise of reflexivity in qualitative research has the tendency of being a self-indulgent exercise for researchers that can ultimately reinforce distance and difference between the researcher and her subjects, undermining the very goal of this research to bring about social change.

Acknowledging her assertion that reflexivity should comprise an ancillary role within the research project, I address it only briefly here as a way to recognize my knowledge as being situated and partial.

3.5 Data analysis

I employed a grounded theory approach to my investigation, which allowed me to assume an inductive, exploratory and open-ended perspective through all stages of data collection and analysis. Drawing on the early work of Glaser and Strauss (1967), Charmaz (2006) interprets grounded theory as a guide to collecting and analyzing data, rather than a strict set of tools. The application of grounded theory is used to focus on a social process and demands that the researcher be attentive to ideas as they emerge. Constant comparison of the emergent themes with initial data prompts the refinement and focus of further data collection as the researcher builds a theoretical framework from the ground up. Within my study, a grounded theory approach enabled me to observe how different actors in the DTES perceived and acted upon the charitable response to hunger while giving me the freedom to follow different leads as they emerged. This led me to new inquiries as well as helped me work through interpretation and analysis as I compared my various sources of data.

A grounded theory approach to research is not a linear process and I was prompted to return to the field to collect further data as I began to identify emergent themes. For example, through my interviews I was continually told about the observed racism directed toward Chinese elders who accessed charitable food, though it became clear that the source of this racism was not well understood by many in the community. In an effort to gain some insight into this situation, I helped facilitate focus groups through the RJ project with three groups of Chinese elders and asked specific questions on the topic of food access in the DTES. In another instance, I returned to the field after I thought I had completed my one-on-one interviews because I realized that I had not interviewed anyone from the Board of Directors of the DTES NH and that doing so

could potentially yield different insights into the work of the organization that had not emerged during the interviews with staff and volunteers or my participation in the research setting.

All interviews and focus groups were recorded and transcribed verbatim. I used the online qualitative research data analysis software Dedoose (www.dedoose.com) to organize interview transcripts and field journal data. Through an initial process of open coding (Schiellerup 2007), I assigned codes line-by-line, staying close to the data and remaining open to any new ideas that might emerge. I used memos to track analytic insights about the codes, which helped in building a theoretical framework. As I progressed, I compared the assigned codes with each other, which continually informed how new codes were assigned and highlighted patterns as they began to emerge in the data. I returned to each document and undertook a second phase of coding in order to strengthen the consistency of how codes were applied within the data, which resulted in some minor changes. The initial coding process produced almost 300 codes, which I reduced to 260 by merging together repetitive codes. At this stage, I found it challenging to move forward in my analysis due to the limitations of the software and the vast number of codes that I had generated. I chose to print out the coded excerpts and as I read through them, I began grouping codes together by assigning them to a ‘code family’, which reflected the initial categories I had identified in the data through open coding and memoing. I found more freedom and flexibility once I was able to physically group and rearrange excerpts, and having the data laid out in this way enabled me to more effectively identify the relationships, similarities and differences between different pieces of data.

I ended up with 5 code families which were grouped into 3 key analytic domains: (1) Emergence of RTF in the DTES; (2) The DTES NH as an RTF incubator; (3) ‘Scaling up’ RTF. The first domain, *Emergence of RTF in the DTES*, pertains to the specific geography of food provision in the DTES insofar as how many interviewees contextualized their understanding of and involvement in RTF. The context of the community was an important part of understanding why and how this paradigm has emerged in the wake of the charitable food model. Importantly, the entrenchment of the ‘charity mentality’, experiences of accessing charitable food, issues related to income and housing and the importance of building social relationships around food were highlighted by interviewees as being motivations to organize around food. *The DTES NH as an RTF incubator*: Interviewees discussed the perceived role of the DTES NH in the neighbourhood, particularly as an inclusive community space and vehicle for organizing. This also brought up some of the internal tensions in the organization around how the DTES NH should respond to neighbourhood change and the pressures imposed by gentrification on the low-income community. *‘Scaling up’ RTF*: Interviewees discussed some of the barriers as well opportunities to building a RTF movement in the broader community, both within the DTES as well as at the municipal level. Interviewees commented on the perceived discursive and practical influence of the DTES NH on food provision in the community, the limitations of RTF as an organizing philosophy and the disconnect between the prevailing ‘food movement’ in Vancouver and the interests and needs of the DTES community. The data collected in my field journal as well as through the roundtable discussion accompanied these findings, adding depth and clarity to the themes.

3.6 Methodological rigour

Following Baxter & Eyles (1997) criteria for evaluating rigour in qualitative research, I endeavored to focus on strategies that would support the credibility, transferability, confirmability and dependability of my results. *Credibility* is a key principle of qualitative research, which refers to the ability of those involved in the research as well as the wider academic and lay community to recognize and/or understand the experiences interpreted by the researcher. I ensured credibility in my research by returning data to research participants at different stages of my project. All interviewees received written transcripts within a month following their interviews and were given the opportunity to review and make changes or additions to the data. Most of the interviewees reviewed and approved their transcripts and three people made minor changes for factual accuracy. The research presentation and roundtable discussion was designed as a member-checking exercise to give interviewees the opportunity to hear about my early interpretations of the data and provide feedback. Attendees at the presentation (n=6) confirmed the accuracy of my interpretations as well as offered commentary that helped to clarify and guide my analysis and theory development. Additionally, the use of the multiple methods of data collection described in the preceding section allowed for triangulation of data and reduced the risk of misinterpretation (Denzin 1978). *Transferability* refers to the ability for groups outside of the study context to find meaning in the results of the research. I worked to support transferability within this research by providing a high level of detail about the research context as well as thick description of my interpretations so that the study can be well understood by those outside of the research context. *Confirmability* demands that the researcher be accountable for their research design and interpretations, including the influence of their own biases and interests throughout the process. As a strategy to support confirmability, I kept detailed notes on my research process in my field journal and have included excerpts from

my journal within the results chapter. *Dependability* is another criterion for rigorous qualitative research that Lincoln & Guba (1985) contend is prerequisite for ensuring credibility. Somewhat similar to confirmability, dependability refers to the consistency of interpretations and outcomes in a research project and the minimization of researcher bias in the execution of the project. In addition to the member checking and triangulation strategies described above which also support dependability, I employed several other strategies, including the provision of a detailed account of research tools and procedures and the use of a research journal to reflect on and guard against the influence of my positionality throughout every stage of the project.

3.7 Methodological limitations

My methodological choices in this project were influenced by a number of different factors. I chose procedures that would allow me to obtain detailed narratives from key stakeholders involved in the RTF movement in the DTES community. The number of interviews that I conducted was somewhat limited given the relative short length of time I was able to spend in the research setting. More time and resources would have allowed me to conduct a wider suite of interviews as well as perhaps employ different data collection tools such as community surveys. This may have yielded more detailed results and incorporated a greater range of community perspectives on the topic of RTF; however, my choice to use a purposeful sampling approach with a small group of key informants ensured that there was a diversity of perspectives on the subject. Further, the decision to focus research strategies involving a smaller group of stakeholders and regular participation in the research setting gave me detailed and in-depth insights into an organization that is in many ways at the centre of RTF work in the DTES. I concluded my interviews when I felt that I had reached data saturation and no new or relevant information was cited by key stakeholders.

In the next chapter, I present the results of my research. **Section 4.1** addresses the entrenchment of charitable food delivery and the associated discourse that gave rise to an RTF movement. **Section 4.2** outlines the structural factors, including poverty and inadequate housing, which contribute to food insecurity in the DTES. **Section 4.3** describes how RTF is understood and put into practice by people in the DTES, focusing on three RTF ‘spaces’ and examining their impact in the community. **Section 4.4** explores how participants imagine building an RTF movement, including the obstacles to ‘scaling up’ RTF and the influence of a rights discourse on broader food system transformation.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

As described in Chapter 1, the Downtown Eastside Neighbourhood House (DTES NH) was established in 2005 by a steering committee of 26 community members who identified a need for a neighbourhood house in the community. Since then, the Downtown Eastside Neighbourhood House has been explicitly working to assert the right of DTES residents to high-quality, culturally appropriate, nutritious food through various initiatives, challenging the traditional approach to food insecurity manifested in the charitable food sector. In addition to the Drop In Program which provides community members with on-site meals and activities at their storefront, monthly off-site programs such as the Mobile Smoothie Project and Banana Beat are nutritional outreach initiatives that provide people on the street with important nutrients before and during ‘cheque day’ in an effort to affirm the dignity and deservedness of individuals on days when they are most likely to experience nutritional deprivation. The DTES NH has also offered free workshops to residents of the DTES on topics such as urban agriculture and activism. As an organization that has adopted the right to food (RTF) as an organizing tool, the DTES NH served as a starting point in my analysis of how this work emerged and has evolved in the community.

This chapter, organized into four sections, will explain how RTF activism has grown in the DTES NH as a locally-situated response to the perceived injustices of charitable food delivery and what this looks like today. These findings are the results of an analysis that blended multiple sources of data, including my one-on-one interviews, textual data, focus groups, journals and participant observation.

4.1 The entrenched charitable model and the emergence of right to food in the DTES

The one-on-one interviews with DTES NH affiliates and others involved in RTF activism were focused loosely around the question of how each interviewee understood the concept of RTF. In describing their understandings, interviewees referred frequently to aspects of the DTES food system that were seen to be simultaneously frustrating and motivating elements for engaging in RTF activism and determining the focus of this work. Broadly, these included the ways that hunger and poverty are represented in dominant discourse surrounding food provision in the neighbourhood. Interviews and focus groups with stakeholders outside of the DTES NH, in addition to my textual analysis and observations in the field, helped to contextualize or support many of the claims made by activists. The following section introduces four aspects of the charitable model as described by key stakeholders, highlighting the ways in which this model is positioned in opposition to the notion of RTF.

4.1.1 The 'weaponization' of food: motivations for the 'right to food' in the DTES

Interviewees who were involved in the development of the DTES NH noted that food was a prominent idea in the initial stages of building the Neighbourhood House. Early conversations among members of the steering committee focused on how the predominant model of food delivery did not support the nutritional needs or dignity of neighbourhood residents, the majority of whom were facing day-to-day food insecurity. Positioning RTF at the centre of their work enabled the DTES NH to draw attention to how food was being made available to low-income community members, particularly the poor nutritional quality and undignified methods of delivery that were seen at food serving agencies. Ellen, one of the founders of the DTES NH,

described the circumstances that she observed in the community at the time that the organization was established, explaining how food had become ‘weaponized’, used as a tool to exert power and control over people who accessed free food at community organizations:

Food was being used as a weapon. And to me that means if you have to pray to eat, if you have to line up to eat, if you have to wait to eat, if I have to obey to eat, if I have to have a behaviour that pleases you, like if you have the power to deny me an apple or a meal based on my behaviour, that is using food as a weapon.

Those involved in developing the mandate of the DTES NH did not believe that food, a fundamental human right, should be tied to standards of behaviour or compliance with a set of rules. In response to what was perceived as a punitive model of food delivery, community members and advocates brought RTF into their work. The strong philosophical orientation toward RTF in the mandate of the DTES NH was influenced not only by the observed nutritional vulnerability in the neighbourhood but also the understanding that food could be an effective mechanism to bring together diverse members of the DTES community. Ellen, who eventually became the first Executive Director of the DTES NH, explained the decision to use RTF as an “organizing vehicle” to build solidarity across lines of difference within the community:

It was never to be the only thing that we would organize around and work around. It was that the right to food would be our way to make the call out to sex workers, please belong to your Neighbourhood House. And to grannies of all elders, and to young parents of children, and to the children themselves, and to people living with HIV/AIDS and to people living with Hep C and all the rest of it. But the right to food would touch everyone, was relevant to everyone in the community.

There are a vast number of organizations serving individuals in the DTES, many of which were profiled in the newspaper articles that I collected for my textual analysis. Throughout the course of my time in the neighbourhood I heard many people refer to the concentration of social services in the community. However, due to both the criteria dictated by funders as well as the diverse needs of the community, many of these organizations are set up to target

particular groups rather than provide space for the whole community to gather. The concept of RTF was seen by founders of the DTES NH as the foundation for what was imagined to be an inclusive space to build community. Maria, another member of the steering committee, recognized this aspect of developing the DTES NH as being an important consideration that set them apart from other organizations in the DTES:

The uniqueness of it to me has always been that we don't need you to fit a certain criteria for the house. You know, many organizations require some level of defining criteria for one to access the services, and one of the beauties of the house is that it does not. And so the welcoming piece is truly part of the vision and mission statement, that it is a welcoming space to all.

The DTES NH offers a drop in meal program but never intended to fill the role of a food provider. Rather, food was seen as a tool to create a welcoming and inclusive space where neighbours could meet each other, while at the same time pointing to the shortcomings of the charitable model in meeting the fundamental human rights of low-income neighbourhood residents. The fragmentation and uncoordinated delivery of food in the neighbourhood was an identified issue but beyond the scope of the work of the DTES NH. In an effort to expand the reach of the RTF movement, Ellen co-founded the DTES Kitchen Tables Project in 2009 in partnership with the Potluck Café Society, a social enterprise restaurant and catering company in the DTES. The goal of the Kitchen Tables Project is to increase the availability and choice of fresh, nutritious and culturally appropriate food in the community while supporting local employment in cooperation with residents, organizations and donors. The Kitchen Tables Project runs a peer-led nutritional outreach project and works closely with neighbourhood food providers to improve the coordination, quality and methods of food delivery in the DTES. Like the DTES NH, the Kitchen Tables Project is focused on reforming the DTES food system by working in cooperation with charitable food providers and at the same time endeavoring to challenge the

discourse and practices that underpin the charity model by advocating for the right to food for DTES residents.

4.1.2 Building dependency and deepening class divisions

A focal point of criticism among RTF activists is the charity model and the accompanying discourse, which undermines community self-sufficiency by fostering a system of dependency. This discourse has served to entrench charitable food delivery in the DTES and represents one aspect of the food system that RTF activists seek to challenge. One key finding from my textual analysis was that over a 13-year period, over 50% of the 97 news articles on food in the DTES pertained to charitable initiatives, the majority of which appeared around Thanksgiving and Christmas – times when the DTES experiences an influx of volunteer interest at the shelters and agencies who provide free community meals. These articles predominantly feature volunteer profiles and positive quotes from neighbourhood residents about the meals, intended to present ‘feel-good’ stories for the holidays. When the issue of limited access to nutrition for community residents is addressed, there is little examination of the role that the charitable food system plays in perpetuating hunger and malnutrition. In the Tyee, an ‘alternative’ media source, there is a stronger analysis of the relationship between charity and malnutrition; however, the mainstream media effectively reinforces the prevailing discourse that the charitable response to hunger is to be supported, celebrated and not criticized.

One of the challenges that some interviewees identified in intervening in the practices of food provision in the DTES was this powerful equation of charity with ‘doing good’. To suggest that charity might have damaging consequences or that the contemporary model of charitable food

delivery is not rooted in a sense of justice contradicts widely held beliefs that engaging in charity work is a valuable way to ‘give back’. Food activists in the DTES operationalize RTF to provide a critique of the charity model but it is the method of delivery, not the benevolent provision of free food itself, which is the source of criticism. Interviewees understand RTF as a set of guiding principles that should be used to inform changes that need to happen in the sourcing, distribution and delivery of food to low-income community members in the DTES. Both Maria and Allison, a current staff member at the DTES NH, addressed the problematic power dynamics inherent in food distribution in the community that positioned recipients of food charity subordinate to food providers, agencies and volunteers from backgrounds of relative privilege. They both expressed a disdain for the dominant characterization of ‘the grateful poor’ and Allison insisted that RTF-informed food provision should include some degree of reciprocity:

A lot of people get a lot of benefit out of giving. And we often remove people from that opportunity; we take that opportunity away from them. And I think that the one thing that happens here, and I don’t know that it’s well articulated in the right to food philosophy is empowering people to be able to have the opportunity to give. So when they can come into the kitchen and they can serve and they can cook and create something that they can give. It’s a different level of power that’s exerted than is in the normal scheme of handing out food... no one down here gets that feel good feeling about being able to give, because they’re always on the receiving end.

What RTF advocates made clear is that many residents of the DTES rely upon a system that depends on the benevolence of people with wealth and privilege without questioning the circumstances that produce wealth inequality. The lack of critical analysis about how the charitable model upholds the status quo reflects the way that food access is no longer a political question. The individualization of the issues of poverty and food insecurity brought about by neoliberalization is a frustration for those who seek to draw attention to the relationship between malnutrition in the DTES and an inherently unequal political and economic system.

4.1.3 De-politicization of food insecurity

Interviewees talked about the ‘beggars can’t be choosers’ mentality toward low-income people who rely on food providers, which is fed by perceptions from both within and outside of the community. This attitude is reflective of the overwhelming belief that ‘hunger’ is an individual problem, held separate from issues surrounding the distribution of resources in society. As Emma, a former Director at the DTES NH, pointed out, this attitude denies the rights of poor people to have moral or political perspectives on food:

There really is this grateful for crumbs kind of sentiment out there, and ‘you know what, who are you to actually take a moral stance on something related to food and animal welfare and carbon footprint or anything? You’re homeless, you’re living in poverty, you take what you get, and be happy about it’.

This view of the poor assumes that people who rely on charity should be grateful for whatever they receive, even when the food they are given is inappropriate or expired. Julie, a community member and staff at the DTES NH, observed that this idea is so ingrained in people’s minds that people in the DTES are less likely to complain about being given substandard food. She used the example of Quest, a not-for-profit grocery store that receives donations of surplus inventory from large retailers that would otherwise be thrown away and sells it to low-income people at a discount:

I see people go to Quest and I’m thinking, you know, they’re happy to buy rotted food. A lot of it is rotted, old. Same with any food bank you go to. You’re given rotted food and you’re supposed to be happy and grateful and not complain.

This claim has been reported by the Kitchen Tables project as well in 2010, after they found in a survey of 376 community residents that half of the respondents cited food poisoning or receiving moldy food as being common experiences. In their analysis of this issue, they suggest that donors to Quest and elsewhere do not have a good understanding of the health consequences of past-dated or moldy food on people who are malnourished or have compromised health (Vallee

& Buswa 2010). It could be added that perhaps a de-politicized, individual-blaming discourse also has an influence on donor's ideas about what standards of food are acceptable to give to people living in poverty. In the DTES, where high-end restaurants neighbour charitable food providers, one cannot help but notice the way that food has become commoditized in the free market. The freedom of choice over where, what and when one can eat is a privilege available to those who can afford it. In the Chinese language focus groups, interviewees expressed that it was uncommon to find food that fit their cultural tastes at local free food providers. However, this was rarely framed as a complaint but rather an observation (and acceptance) of the fact that living on a limited income inherently limits one's choices. They stated that they would either choose "cheap food" or eat whatever was available from food providers if they were hungry. James, one of the Chinese language focus group participants, suggested that eating in the DTES reflects the primacy of survival over cultural preferences:

Food for me, like my personal opinion is first it's to survive and second it's for taste, your personal taste, and third is the enjoyment of the food. But the second one and the third one is associated with money. So different people they have different tastes and different ways to enjoy food, so without money, it's very hard.

The powerful influence of the charitable discourse is evidenced in the ways that food is distributed at the community level. Community members who were involved in developing the mandate and goals of the DTES NH observed the practices of the charitable response to nutritional vulnerability in the community and sought to address the dehumanization and nutritional vulnerability of their neighbours. The main concerns of those involved related to the poor nutritional quality and undignified methods of food delivery that characterized food provision in the neighbourhood, which are discussed in the following section.

4.1.4 Compromising the health & well-being of people in the city

'Survival geographies': finding food in the DTES

When discussing RTF, five of the interviewees explicitly referred to past or present lived experiences of homelessness or living below the poverty line, which included accessing publicly available food through DTES organizations. These stories, which highlight the ways in which food delivery is materially shaped by the charitable discourse, provide insight into the circumstances that influenced how a RTF movement emerged in the community. These experiences also reflected much of what other examinations of food provision in the DTES have identified -- that most of the food available to residents in the DTES does not support the collective well-being of the community. When describing their daily food journeys, these interviewees reflected on the myriad ways that they acquired free or low-cost food in the neighbourhood. David has lived in the DTES since the 1980s and over time has developed networks and income generating activities that give him a bit more choice and autonomy over his diet. He also has secure, affordable housing with a kitchen, which allows him to store and prepare food at home. However, when he first arrived in the community he had an injury and was under-housed, leaving him dependent on the free food available in the community. He reflected on his daily rituals at that time, which involved going from one organization to another for each meal:

The Salvation Army was lunch. Lifeskills started to have lunch then. And the Rainbow place, I'd go there for supper. But in the middle of the night there was nowhere to go. So you had to stock up too eh? And you'd have to save it somehow. Without refrigeration, you know, a tiny little fridge or no fridge at all.

In addition to visiting organizations at various times during the day, interviewees who had lived experiences of being low-income or homeless also mentioned binning, sharing food with neighbours, buying food through the informal economy, growing vegetables in community

gardens and volunteering for organizations in exchange for a meal. These experiences align with what Ellen described as the “quasi-science” of eating in the DTES. She pointed to the challenges of surviving life on the street or in precarious housing and having to figure out not only where to eat but how this necessary task fits in with the other daily chores made difficult in an area of intentional disinvestment and impoverishment:

It is a quasi science... the survival intelligence that it takes to survive material poverty – let alone any physical or mental health challenge and substance problem – it takes a great deal of intelligence to ferret out, “where can I get my laundry done? Where can I get a cup of tea? Who’s open now? When does lunch finish? What will they have? Do they have a vegetarian thing? Am I allergic to this?”

Without adequate housing and kitchen facilities, people must develop a high degree of resourcefulness in order to find enough food, which means that all activities become oriented around survival and the anticipation of where the next meal will come from. Linda, a staff member of the Kitchen Tables Project who has survived and overcome homelessness and addiction, found a community of people living in a park who offered mutual support to each other by sharing resources and food:

We’d put all our belongings in two shopping carts and we’d drag the dog around and sit in parks and then forage for food and stand in line-ups, until we found that there was 10 other people living in a field which was very contaminated down by Strathcona Park, and you had to be accepted to get in there, almost, and we ended up in there. So a lot of the times we pooled our resources, and by going binning - it means going looking in garbage cans.

The ‘soup line’, a characteristic of traditional charitable food delivery, continues to be a feature in the landscape of food provision in the DTES. In the 2010 Kitchen Tables survey, the majority of respondents reported that they accessed food through a lineup, which can amount to hours spent waiting in lines each day (Vallee & Buswa 2010). RTF advocates describe the experience of waiting in line to receive a meal as undignified – a highly visible and often uncomfortable signifier to the rest of the world of one’s material poverty. Several interviewees pointed out that

people must wait outside in all kinds of weather and that being cold, wet and hungry undoubtedly contributes to the tension and hostility that is observed in the lines.

The lineup is also an ableist space - those coping with a physical or mental challenge face barriers to accessing food in this way. For example, mental health issues brought Bryan to the DTES in the 1980s after he stopped taking his medication and as a result, experienced psychosis for two years. During that time he lived on the street or stayed in shelters. His illness made it impossible for him to wait in line-ups and so like Linda, he found food by dumpster diving:

I never really stood in line. I did it once or twice but felt such huge anxiety and also experienced so much hostility and animosity from the other people in the line because I was yelling at people who weren't there and punching the air at people no one else saw. And so I just stopped... I started doing in a bigger way what I had always done, and that was to eat whatever I found. On the street, or in a bin, or in a garbage can.

The demand placed on residents in the DTES to stand in line repeatedly for hours of the day represents a certain level of control that food-serving organizations have over the health and well-being of people in the community. If people are unable or unwilling to visit a food lineup, they will resort to whatever tactics they need to in order to obtain food, despite the negative consequences of such measures on their physical and mental health.

Racialization of food access

I found it nearly impossible to have conversations about charitable food delivery with people in the DTES without confronting the issue of how different cultural groups interacted with the food system. Interviewees frequently pointed to the diverse demographic of the DTES and the lack of culturally appropriate food in the community. Chinese and First Nations communities comprise a sizeable portion of the population, representing two of the “founding communities” of the DTES; however, the menus offered by neighbourhood organizations are predominantly Euro-centric.

Andrew runs an Aboriginal community kitchen at the DTES NH with the goal of strengthening traditional knowledge and ties between community members. For many like himself who attended residential schools and later lived in non-Aboriginal foster homes, their adolescence was marked by an absence of traditional teachings and connections to their communities. Now Andrew sees initiatives such as the community kitchen as necessary opportunities for this learning to take place:

It's mostly regaining that knowledge, is what the problem is, 'cause so much has been lost... Even me, I don't remember, even after I got pulled off the reserve, I never foraged again and that sort of thing. Cause the schools always cooked for ya, very bad food. And then when I was in homes, foster homes or whatever you want to call it, it was—they cooked for ya. So no need to go and forage if they'll provide it for you. So it's to regain the knowledge of food I guess it would be for Aboriginals. Learning the old ways.

From the perspective of a staff of the Kitchen Tables Project working with diverse members of the community, Jane identified this lack of cultural representation as being an issue that is also connected to the dearth of programming for particular cultural groups, highlighting the important role of food in building communication around issues of concern:

Our food system doesn't reflect the ethnic diversity in the neighbourhood. So the First Nations don't have access to a lot of their traditional foods... And there needs to be more programs that are geared specifically for Chinese seniors so it's actually accessible and it creates a venue to talk about all those other issues as to, why are you living here? What are those barriers? And addressing all of that.

In addition to this reality, Chinese elders¹ who access charitable food in the DTES report experiences of racism and discrimination from food providers and other community members.

The verbal and sometimes physical aggression toward Chinese people who access services in the

¹ The references to 'Chinese elders' or 'Chinese people' in this chapter are not intended to present the Chinese community in the DTES as a homogenous group, as it is important to recognize the diversity within this community particularly in terms of language, Canadian citizenship and region of origin, which have implications on the internal dynamics of the community. However, in conversations with people working and accessing services in the DTES, I noticed that it was common for this heterogeneity to be ignored, suggesting a lack of awareness of these intersections among the broader community, which influences the dominant perceptions and intercultural conflicts that are discussed in this chapter.

DTES is a growing concern for some in the community who have seen these tensions manifest themselves in food line-ups. Mary and Grace each recounted stories of either witnessing or experiencing hostility from others while visiting organizations:

Mary: Another thing related to getting food, is when you line up there's a lot of Chinese people that butt in line. So Caucasians don't like that. And they tell them to go home, go back to China... not to me, but I hear it. Often.

Grace: One time I was lining up at Salvation Army and I had my umbrella, because it was raining. And then a Caucasian person just spit at me, at my umbrella. So this affects us. Also one time we were lining up in front of Aboriginal Front Door and the person told me to wait, but I waited like 45 minutes and at the end they said no, we won't give you any food because he thought that I was one of those 'greedy elders'.

I personally encountered this issue on multiple occasions while working with the DTES NH.

During a shift with the Banana Beat, in which shopping carts full of bananas are distributed throughout the community on welfare cheque issue day, I witnessed Chinese elders being reprimanded by people who believed that they were taking too many bananas from the cart. After this experience I reflected in my journal about how it was possible that in our role as 'gatekeepers' of the food, we were inadvertently contributing to this hostility and reinforcing stereotypes about Chinese elders:

The worst part was that [the other volunteer's] attitude – for example, asking people how many [bananas] they had taken, saying "no" loudly, etc. – was influencing other people that were standing around to intervene and shout at the Chinese seniors, telling them that they had taken enough. I overheard one woman say, "They're so greedy"... It doesn't help for us to be reinforcing these attitudes by modeling frustration or anger; it will only fuel the racial tension that is already ubiquitous in the neighbourhood.

With little information about why some Chinese elders appear to be relying on charitable food, and few resources to facilitate intercultural communication, people in the community (including organization workers themselves) become frustrated by what they perceive are people abusing a system which has, by design, scarce resources. This frustration was reflected in Julie's comments about her experiences with the Banana Beat:

The older Chinese women, you give them one banana, they want two. You give them two, they want three – literally the same people were running after us for five bananas each. And it is very difficult to deal with that because they will never get enough.

Jane, a social service worker of Chinese descent, is interested in the challenges facing Chinese elders and is one of only a few people working in the neighbourhood with connections to Chinatown and the DTES community, but she has still found it difficult to get information about what the root causes of the issues are:

A lot of them (Chinese elders) say they'll go to food line-ups and sometimes they'll be denied food... And they're constantly seen as the "haves" in the neighbourhood, relative to everybody else. And whether or not that's true, I don't know. It's like, why these seniors are accessing food line-ups, I have no idea... do they actually need it because their incomes are too low and they need to access publicly available food? Do they have no kitchens and so they need to access prepared meals? Is it a social thing, because, well, they know about where the food line-ups are via their social network, because they can't read English? ... Maybe it's like a social isolation thing, and so they come together to access food line-ups as a place to socialize. I have no idea.

Jane, in addition to others in the community who are starting the conversation around this issue, suspect that the increasing property values and processes of gentrification in Strathcona and Chinatown are displacing or straining the incomes of the Chinese elders who have traditionally lived in these areas. It is evident that many Chinese elders in the neighbourhood are living in poverty and that some do not have the support of family networks, though the reasons for this remain speculative. The DTES NH has made efforts over the years to include programming for Chinese elders at the organization as a way to engage them and potentially start having conversations around food access. The Chinese elder's cooking group was a popular initiative at the DTES NH that was run in partnership with another DTES organization, but when the facilitator of the program left the position, there was no one available to fill the gap and the program ended. There are few resources and very little information available, including demographic data, that could help organizations and concerned community members understand

the particular needs of Chinese elders and how to best address them. At the very least, it is apparent that the dominant model of food provision is exacerbating inter-cultural conflicts in the community.

Those who are working on the front lines of community organizations and have witnessed the intercultural tensions in the neighbourhood are increasingly interested in finding ways to address the issues that are expressed most noticeably in food line-ups. Staff at the DTES NH made an effort to mediate the conflicts happening during the Banana Beat by attaching signs to the shopping cart in written Chinese indicating that each person was entitled to two bananas and asking people to refrain from reaching into the cart. In conversations with staff at the DTES NH, it was made clear to me that this was not seen as a perfect solution but simply an attempt to ease the frustration and stress felt by some the staff and volunteers who participated in Banana Beat. They suspected that some of the Chinese elders, who were predominantly women, were taking more than what others thought they needed because they were collecting food for family members at home. This created an unresolved discomfort for staff who acknowledged that limited resources made it nearly impossible to address these underlying issues. In one instance, one of the staff at the DTES NH questioned the entire premise of Banana Beat, expressing her unease with the fact that the initiative did not deviate very far from the charity model. As someone relatively new to the organization, she did not understand what purpose Banana Beat served and felt frustrated that it was mirroring many of the same characteristics of traditional charitable food delivery in the community. At the inception of the DTES NH, Banana Beat was intended to be a way for the DTES NH to connect with the broader community and to both canvas people for their ideas about what the organization could be while interrupting the

omnipresent lineups of ‘Welfare Wednesday’. Perhaps due to the frequency of staff turnover at the DTES NH or its evolving mandate, there appears to now be a disconnect between the philosophy and the practice of the organization, which is observable in the Banana Beat project.

At a broader scale, staff of numerous DTES community organizations, including the DTES NH, and other interested stakeholders began meeting in January 2014 as part of a coordinated response to shared concerns about the experiences of Chinese elders in the community. I went to the first meeting, which was attended by about 50 people representing a cross-section of interests and organizations. At one point during a group discussion, someone in attendance suggested that the dominant method of food delivery in the neighbourhood was contributing to the problems being identified and that perhaps more focus should be put on eliminating food line-ups altogether, prompting a staff member from an organization that operates a food line to respond that it was more important to address the immediate concerns about mitigating conflicts within the line-up. This sentiment was reflected in a preliminary report distributed by the group in March 2014 titled ‘Problems in Food Line-Ups in the Downtown Eastside’, which compiled the most common incidences of verbal and physical abuse in line-ups and presented a list of possible approaches that could help organizations manage conflict. These suggestions focus primarily on how to increase understanding of and compliance with rules in order to make the line-ups operate more smoothly and do not include any ideas about how to reduce the need for a food line-up in the first place.

The inability or unwillingness of organizations to examine and address the structural factors that underpin issues in the DTES food system is something that frustrates as well as implicates RTF

activists at the DTES NH, as they must navigate the same limitations that contribute to an organizational culture of addressing only the symptoms of much larger problems. Interviewees pointed to the complex relationship between food and other entrenched issues in the neighbourhood, signaling that RTF activism requires a lens that extends beyond food delivery.

4.2 ‘It’s about poverty’: the structural causes of food insecurity

4.2.1 Inadequate social assistance

Poverty as well as a lack of affordable and appropriate housing are two of the reasons that many in the community rely on food provided by the charitable sector. Anti-poverty advocates and people living on social assistance have demonstrated that welfare rates and minimum wages do not reflect the cost of living in BC (Dieticians of Canada 2011), meaning that people must spend an increasing amount of their income on rent and are left with little to no money for other basic needs including food. Raise the Rates, a campaign that advocates for increasing welfare rates in BC, has calculated that after the deduction of modest living expenses, the \$610 individual monthly welfare allotment leaves individuals with only \$109 a month for food, or \$26 a week (Raise the Rates 2013), making it impossible for someone to obtain adequate nutrition if they are reliant on social assistance alone. Meanwhile, in her work at a shelter with low income seniors in the DTES, Diane has found that most of the funding that is available for programming continues to be targeted at teaching skills, not alleviating poverty:

You don’t need to educate seniors about nutrition, you need to figure out ways that seniors can have more access to food, because I work with many seniors here and they can cook... It’s about poverty, it’s not about lack of capacity. And I find lots of the seniors stuff, like the one pot cooking, it’s all around whether or not seniors have capacity, not whether they have access to the resources.

4.2.2 Culture of volunteerism

Most interviewees brought up the lack of employment opportunities for residents within the community organizations that are purportedly there to support them. Moreover, as Ellen pointed out, “none of these organizations could even open their doors” without the volunteers in their meal programs, many of whom are DTES residents, suggesting that there is a lack of capacity or will within the structure of food focused social programs to address the underlying causes of poverty. Jane also described the reliance on volunteer labour in the community and framed it as a representation of the unsustainability of the DTES food system due to its dependence on free inputs:

What is that true cost (of food in the DTES)? And we don't talk about that, because it's volunteer labour. And then we praise volunteer labour, after that. It's like, “Good for you!” Well, actually, people are getting to the point where they cannot—they have to volunteer in order to access their meal, or it's become this machine of volunteerism.

These organizations and agencies provide few meaningful employment opportunities for DTES residents and are predominantly staffed by people who do not live in the neighbourhood. This does not go unnoticed by many in the community who feel that residents are taken advantage of by local organizations while opportunities for paid employment are given to people from outside the neighbourhood. David noted that while residents are frequently called upon to help with neighbourhood initiatives, these contributions are undervalued or exploited:

Very few of the local people get paid work, usually we're just used as a resource, I'd say, to helping grant proposals, so they can say, 'Oh they're doing all this stuff in kind, so you can give us all this money and we'll just pay ourselves, and we'll get all these people to do it for nothing'. You know, it's not fair. But that's how they write grant proposals, right?

Heather, a staff member at the DTES NH, also expressed her concern about this issue, noting the irony of the fact that organizations who in their mandates exist to serve poor people do not do enough to remove the barriers that perpetuate poverty:

So many things get done in [the DTES] because people volunteer. It's almost ridiculous; it's so disproportionate because people have no job opportunities. They also can often get special privileges for volunteering, like they might get to eat first, or they might get to do stuff in an organization, get free things that they wouldn't get. So there's almost this sort of strange tension, I think, around how much volunteers are used and even over-used in the community.

The use of food as a reward or incentive for work has echoes of Ellen's reference to food being used as a weapon in the community. When the distribution of food is operationalized in this way, with food being withheld or offered based on the actions and behaviour of individuals, it directly contradicts the notion within RTF that everyone has a fundamental right to food regardless of who they are. These comments from community residents and workers above reflect the perception that many food-serving organizations in the neighbourhood are simply reinforcing the status quo rather than working to challenge the structural underpinnings of nutritional vulnerability among community members.

4.2.3 The relationship between housing and food insecurity

In addition to the issue of poverty and lack of supportive employment opportunities in the community, interview participants also frequently brought up the related concern of inadequate and insufficient housing in the neighbourhood. There are many ways in which housing plays a role in how people access and consume food that have implications on the health, well-being and social cohesion of the population. DTES housing activists, such as the Carnegie Community Action Project (CCAP), attribute the loss of affordable rental housing at welfare rates to the increase of market rate rentals and condominiums as land speculation and gentrification continue to intensify in the neighbourhood. As noted earlier, increasing rents have a direct impact on food acquisition for those on a limited budget. Grace, a Chinese language focus group participant who

has been unable to get into BC Housing, identified housing as being the biggest barrier to accessing proper nutrition:

It's a chain effect, so if I had BC Housing then I would have more money to live healthier. So it's that simple. If I had better housing then it would solve these issues.

SROs, which I heard many in the community refer to as the most affordable housing option in the neighbourhood, generally lack kitchen facilities. Without anywhere to prepare or store food, residents must rely largely on prepared meals from charitable organizations, effectively denying the agency and choice of community members. David, who now lives in a self-contained unit but spent many years in SROs, noted the importance of this autonomy:

You can't live on a healthy diet if you don't have a place to cook. And to be able to cook at home I think is very important, at least to have a meal in the morning or you know, be able to get up in the middle of the night and make something for yourself.

Despite the widely recognized inability of SROs to provide adequate living environments for people, there is still a lack of comprehensive efforts in the community to address the implications of inappropriate housing on nutritional vulnerability. In line with Diane's observation that funding continues to be targeted at building capacity in individuals rather than addressing their general lack of access to nutrition, Andrew stated that community kitchen programs focus on education and neglect the fundamental issue that many people do not have a kitchen at home:

We now do more community kitchens and we teach people more about how to cook and get hands on. And I think that's important but I think the one thing they actually overlook is a lot of people down here don't have cooking facilities.

The issue of social isolation should also not be overlooked in any discussion focused on the food system and housing in the DTES. Over the course of my involvement in the DTES, I heard many people talk about the street as the 'living room' of the DTES because most housing is too small or inappropriate to accommodate socializing with friends and neighbours. Ellen explained that this blurs the line between public and private space in the DTES:

[People are] just more visible on the streets because people are under housed, so they're fleeing their squalid – 5,000 people, at least – are fleeing their squalid SRO room, and what otherwise is public space is in fact semi-private space, or private space in the DTES, because people are obliged to socialize on sidewalks or in parks because they don't have the private space in which to do it.

This different conceptualization of space also changes the way that people interact with each other through food. The act of sitting together and sharing a meal is an inherent part of all cultures, providing opportunities to build social relationships and ease loneliness. However, for many people living in the DTES, this ritual is missing from their home lives due to the limitations of the housing that is available or affordable. After years of being homeless or living in SROs, Linda now lives in an apartment with her partner. She spoke about how having the space for a kitchen table in her home has meant that she now has a safe place for her family to come together around a meal:

Somebody asked me actually when I got my apartment, was what do you like most about your apartment? And I said, the kitchen table... The shower is great, having your own bathroom is right up there. But to have somewhere where my family can now see me and sit around the table, and be a family, and enjoy food and enjoy each other, was the biggest gift I got when I got my apartment.

David talked about his experience of acquiring safe and affordable housing after many years of living in SROs with shared and inadequate facilities. His apartment is 350 square feet and he is grateful to have his own kitchen, bathroom, living room and bedroom. However, unlike Linda, the size of his dwelling prohibits him from sharing meals with people in his home and he finds it necessary to leave home in order to eat with others in spaces where food is made available:

I still don't have a kitchen table. It's not big enough to have people in there to sit around the table. It's not designed into the system... And I have always found that necessary for my own health, to get out of the apartment, out of this confined space, because it just simply isn't big enough for you to live in. So this is the kind of community that we live in, that we need these community spaces.

Other interviewees talked about the importance of going to the DTES NH or other neighbourhood organizations to escape isolation at home and share meals with other people. Kim, Sue and Mary, Chinese language focus group participants who don't live in the DTES, all stated that they prepared most of their own food at home but visited neighbourhood organizations for opportunities to see friends and socialize. James lives alone and regularly accesses free food in the community. He favours the DTES NH because it provides opportunities to comfortably sit and socialize with neighbours. Julie also lives alone but prepares most of her food at home and occasionally goes to the DTES NH or the Carnegie Community Centre, where low cost meals are available. Like James, her preference is to visit the DTES NH because she enjoys eating with others. After growing up in an abusive family situation, Julie has found a network of friends and supports in the community:

The Neighbourhood House is a tighter time frame (than Carnegie) and it's much more community oriented. You can sit down and eat with someone and you feel like you're eating with people better than family. And I like that. I like the calmer environment.

It appears that while many in the community rely on charitable food for survival, DTES residents may also use some food-serving organizations as spaces for socializing. Some members of the DTES who live in SROs or social housing organize community meals for their neighbours in common spaces. At a community event, I spoke with a man who told me about how he shopped for and prepared communal meals for the residents of his SRO as a way to bring people together. David also talked about a woman in his building who runs a similar initiative:

She puts on a community meal, she does it all out of her own pocket every Sunday, she pays for all the ingredients, does all the cooking, even does the dishes, and we all work together, you know. That's really what community means.

The social and communicative aspects of food are important to people in the DTES community; however, poverty, inadequate housing and the prevailing methods of food delivery tend to remove opportunities to have these experiences.

It is within the context described in the preceding pages of an entrenched charitable discourse, inadequate and inappropriate food provision and the intersecting concerns around food, poverty and housing that local RTF activists situate the focus of their work. The following sections will outline how RTF is understood and applied by people at the DTES NH.

4.3 Putting right to food into practice

4.3.1 Introduction to RTF

Almost all interviewees first heard about RTF as an organizing principle through the DTES NH and spoke about how it helped to give them a vocabulary to address what they were seeing in the neighbourhood. Jessica and Ben, former staff of the DTES NH, were both working with other food focused organizations when they were introduced to the DTES NH and its RTF philosophy. Each of them found that this idea illuminated what they deemed to be absent from the work that their organizations were doing in the areas of food access and delivery. Colin, who left the DTES NH in 2012 but has continued to use RTF in his current work, explained that the concept articulated a discomfort that he had for most of his life with the charitable model:

I would say that it was in my heart, maybe, for lack of a better word, and in my brain, but the vocabulary wasn't necessarily there... I just knew that the status quo wasn't working, or wasn't right - the way that we created shelters and created non-profits that reinforced the charity model and the poverty mentality.

Two interviewees spoke about how RTF resonated with their personal experiences of food insecurity and gave them an opportunity to do something about the undignified model of food delivery in the neighbourhood. Andrew arrived in the DTES in 2010 after moving to Vancouver and struggling to find work. He was staying in a shelter and relying on charitable food providers at the time that he found out about the DTES NH and their work around RTF. The difficulty that he had finding food that was nutritious and in line with his dietary preferences motivated him to volunteer for the DTES NH, where he eventually found employment:

I got associated with Colin and he was telling me about some of the rights for people and he was saying his story at one of these gatherings. And I said, 'this is something a person can do something about, there has to be something done about these places with the bad food'.

At the municipal level, the DTES NH was influential in putting RTF on the agenda. The Vancouver Food Policy Council (VFPC), an advisory group to the City Council that formed in 2004, focuses broadly on issues that pertain to making the city food system “just and sustainable”. RTF has always been considered a part of this; however, VFPC member Nicholas explained that the issue of food access has more recently become an active focus of the council as a result of becoming more connected to the Neighbourhood House and anti-poverty campaigns:

When it comes down to the Vancouver Food Policy Council, I think the first real way that at least I personally started to dig into some of that stuff [around the right to food] was beginning to have conversations with Colin. And he invited myself and others, but I took him up on it, to connect with Raise the Rates around the Welfare Food Challenge.

Most interviewees highlighted at least one aspect of the United Nations definition of RTF when explaining their own understanding of the concept. Of particular importance to many was the right to choose and have autonomy over one's diet, reflecting the way that RTF is also grounded in a local understanding of how the entrenched charitable food system has come to

disenfranchise DTES residents. Many interviewees referred to things that they had seen and heard in the DTES when explaining how they understood RTF. For example, Emma spoke about the way that RTF evolved as a counter-narrative in response to dominant assumptions about low-income people in the community and the individualization of poverty:

Lots of people say, 'There's no need for somebody to be hungry on the Downtown Eastside... If somebody's hungry on the Downtown Eastside, they are lazy because they don't want to walk to a food line up or soup kitchen... So when that became sort of the dominant discourse or the dominant narrative, I think there was a need to challenge that... And the right to food philosophy evolved into a right to decent food, it's a right to a choice in food, it's a right to have food that is consistent with what your physical health needs are, it's a right to food that's consistent with your culture.

Although most interviewees understood RTF as a tool of reform, conceptualizing RTF in the DTES provoked some people to bring up more radical questions about the arrangement and distribution of material resources in society. Ben explained that the concept of RTF is inseparable from broader conversations about the economic system and the commodification of food and other resources in the capitalist free market:

At the deeper political level... should food be a commodity? Should how much food we buy, should we have to be able to earn the money in order to be able to pay for it? And then who's deserving of a certain kind of income? Well, should we all have living wages, should we all have living income even if we're not earning wages through work? So it ends up having to question everything about our capitalist economy including income and food and land, and the distribution of all those things.

In many ways, RTF has given both residents and people working in and outside of the community a language that is used to communicate the changes that they want to see in the local food system and a means by which to challenge the perceived injustices being carried out through food delivery. In terms of their day-to-day work, interviewees described a number of different ways that RTF was being put into practice in the DTES. The following section

describes three ‘spaces’ which highlight the different ways that people in the DTES are working to advance RTF.

4.3.3 Three right to food ‘spaces’: Intimate, political and discursive spaces

Intimate spaces

Over the course of my involvement with the DTES NH, I came to appreciate that as an organization with scant resources, it was in the intentional creation of space that the DTES NH saw itself as most clearly pursuing its mandate and philosophy of RTF in the community. It is both the absence of a food line-up as well as the implementation of other carefully thought out details that creates a particular environment inside the small space that is different from most other organizations in the community. The belief is that through material expressions of respect and consideration, people can have a sense of deservedness restored that has been taken away through interactions with the charitable model of food provision. One staff member of a large charitable organization in the neighbourhood told me that their food service felt like “a factory”, while the atmosphere at the DTES NH was more comfortable, allowing staff and visitors to intermingle, eat together and spend time instead of being herded in and out the door. Genevieve believes that it is indeed through these seemingly small details that the DTES NH advances RTF:

[RTF] can be articulated in so many little ways, and I feel like the Neighbourhood House does a really good job of telling people what’s in their food and making sure that we serve food that is decent and respectable and that people want to eat, and you know, that I’m happy to sit down with anyone who’s eating and feel like we’re all going to enjoy what we’re doing. I think those little articulations about knowing where your food is from and being able to be involved in the preparation of it, for me that’s all part of it, that’s all part of right to food. And I know that people don’t necessarily have that outside of the Neighbourhood House, or few other places in their life. And that’s how I feel we fulfill our right to food, is through those little details.

The non-verbal communication of RTF is believed by DTES NH staff to be effective in not only facilitating dignified interactions with food but also contribute more broadly to creating an environment where people feel welcome and have a sense of ownership over the space. The ultimate intention is that community members will become involved in the activities of the DTES NH and use the available resources at the organization to meet their own needs. Ben expressed that one of the strengths of the DTES NH has been its ability to maintain a culture of community ownership even while different staff have come and gone:

We have kind of been able to speak to a particular issue but still be open to just being an open space and an open environment where our neighbours can come and create their own programming, and just create a great space. I haven't been in there for almost a year, and [when I came back recently] I knew so many faces, and they were behind the counter, involved in things. So even though I've left as a staff, the institution is theirs.

The DTES NH could also be described as a 'space of encounter' where education and mutual learning can take place. The mandate to provide an inclusive space brings in people from diverse class and cultural backgrounds and the space of the DTES NH provides a venue where differences can be confronted as well as overcome. During the hours of the drop in program, the tensions that exist in the outside community manifest themselves in interactions between people; however, I also witnessed how these encounters have led to the forging of friendships between neighbours. The reduced tension from the absence of a food line up made it possible to more easily negotiate and resolve disagreements between neighbours, as well as provide them with a space to begin to get to know each other. As well, the volunteer opportunities that are offered allow people from middle class backgrounds to work alongside DTES residents, leading to new understandings among the former about the realities of poverty. Tom, who lives outside of Vancouver, explained that before he began volunteering he had the assumption that people living in the DTES had adequate access to food:

When I would drive down through the Downtown Eastside, which I didn't do often, but just down across Hastings or Cordova, I would see people in line-ups, and I thought, 'Well, this is the way it goes for people in the Downtown Eastside,' and I didn't really make anything of it. However, I'm the kind of person who always gives money to people who are begging. I always give a couple of dollars and my wife says, 'No, no, don't do it, don't do it. They have enough to eat'. She's saying, 'They have enough to eat'. And so I don't know where she got that idea from, but that was the idea that I had originally.

As his involvement with the Neighbourhood House grew and he became an active member of the RTF Zine, Tom worked in collaboration with DTES residents whose insights and ideas gave him a new understanding not only of poverty and food insecurity but also the people who live in the DTES and their capacity for collective action:

I started to see a whole lot of issues that were consuming for these people. And here am I in my bourgeois life, I don't think about any of these things... And I appreciated how it was for them, and how they wanted to do something to try to change this, not just for themselves but for others. They're very community minded people. So that was part of my learning experience.

As these quotes illustrate, the space of the DTES NH is understood and demonstrated to be an important space, providing not only a comfortable place for residents to socialize but also an arena in which residents and non-residents of the DTES alike can work, learn and make social change together.

Political spaces

As a grassroots organization, the DTES NH adopted an explicitly political stance to confront what was perceived as the violation of fundamental rights of community members in the DTES. On its website the organization describes itself as “activist, reformist and non-violent, critical of the poverty mentality and its handmaiden the charity model” (DTES NH 2014). RTF is understood both as a tool to bring people together by calling upon their shared rights and experiences of oppression, but it has also served to give the DTES NH a platform for activism

and advocacy that extended beyond the community. Colin described the dual role of the DTES NH, suggesting that both advocacy and the daily operations of the DTES NH can support RTF:

I think it's a combination of kind of some intentional, explicit advocacy or activism, and some more soft, kind of a nuanced approach to inspiring that conversation in folks.

Interviewees saw the creation of a comfortable and welcoming environment as a way to facilitate community engagement with issues related to food access and political participation through projects such as the RTF Zine. The DTES NH was described by some interviewees as a space where people can mobilize with their neighbours as well as learn more about policy and public engagement in a non-threatening atmosphere. The success of these initiatives comes from the fact that food is made available during every activity and workshop, which acknowledges that people require adequate nutrition in order to make a meaningful contribution and build relationships with neighbours. Ben spoke about the goals of a 10-week RTF activism workshop:

That kind of thing of really just providing a space where people feel that they understand the issues that we're grappling with, they're dealing with the questions about what can an organization do, and it's in conversation with their neighbours, like that's the kind of thing that creates the space for someone who otherwise wouldn't feel comfortable running for the board of a Neighbourhood House, might feel comfortable and focused about why they are doing it.

Similarly, Ellen talked about how the DTES NH was intended to serve as a forum for DTES residents to gather and learn about policy in a practical way:

It's like, well what is food policy? Let's demystify that. So bringing in people from the city, involved in social policy related to food... I wanted the word food policy, to translate it, right? That it be translated to them and they [DTES residents] understand, what does it mean to you in your daily life?

Many interviewees pointed out the effectiveness of using a human rights concept as a tool for promoting engagement and starting conversations about alternatives to the charity model both in and outside of the neighbourhood. The idea of RTF was identified as being particularly useful due to the general familiarity that most people already have with human rights. Other phrases

that tend to be used by food activists, such as food security, food sovereignty or food justice, may not resonate with people in the same way that calling upon their rights does. Genevieve stated that this was useful not only in communicating with their neighbours but also other DTES organizations and people from outside of the community. Whatever the audience, human rights concepts can supply a common and accepted language that creates a starting point for conversations about food access. As Colin pointed out, RTF can be an effective way to encourage people to reframe how they think about hunger and poverty:

It reasserts a dialogue for people. We've allowed charity to be the response to hunger. And we teach it to children and we reinforce that throughout our lives. What I like about right to food is it has people thinking a little differently. One, it reminds and introduces people to the fact that we have a right to food in this country. Two, it takes the emphasis away from charitable responses, or creates conditions that allow you to have those conversations that allow you to move away from charitable responses to hunger.

The use of 'rights-talk' by the DTES NH and other organizations engaging with RTF work seems to provide residents and community activists with a tool that can be used strategically to simultaneously inspire individuals, build solidarity among neighbours and make arguments against the charity model at a policy level that are based on a widely recognized concept.

Discursive spaces

The Kitchen Tables Project represents an attempt to take a system-wide approach to RTF in the DTES community. In its initial phase, the project conducted community-based research to identify the areas of the DTES food system that were in need of improvement, which resulted in the development of 7 food solutions. These solutions addressed all aspects of the food system and provided the basis for all future work led by the Kitchen Tables Project. Now in its action phase, the project is focused on working in partnership with neighbourhood food providers to encourage them to improve the coordination and quality of food delivery as well as develop

meaningful employment opportunities for neighbourhood residents. In the short-term, in an effort to help DTES residents make more informed choices about what they are eating, the Kitchen Tables Project developed the Community Food Access Map, which lists when and where food is available over a 24-hour schedule, 7 days a week, with icons that provide information about what can be expected at each meal being served.

One outcome of the work of the Kitchen Tables Project has been the creation of nutritional and food quality standards, or a 'Food Charter', that was developed in collaboration with DTES residents and distributed to food providers and community members, encouraging them to think about and advocate for their right to food. Jane suggested that using a rights framework to talk about food, as well as arming community members with written materials that support this right, has given people more confidence to talk about the poor nutritional quality of the food they are receiving, endeavouring to subvert the 'beggars can't be choosers' mentality:

I think they're starting to feel more empowered to talk about what they're receiving at the food bank, what kind of food they're receiving generally, and again, what those barriers to access are... Basically going back to the food provider and saying something, as opposed to, 'Oh this is usually the shit that you get, so you take what you can'. It's really changing the dynamic of food access and I think that's really powerful because it forces us to start talking about it.

In summary, the work of the DTES NH and other organizations around RTF has focused on supporting dignity and choice for DTES residents and creating needed spaces where people are able to nurture social relationships through food. At the same time, RTF is understood as a powerful tool for community mobilization, encouraging political participation and provoking people to challenge their own assumptions about hunger and charity. Through these projects, people are responding to injustices observed in the neighbourhood and are working to find practical ways to advance the RTF. In terms of building a movement around RTF, interviewees

identified several issues at different scales that impact what they are doing at the community level. The following section describes how funding challenges, processes of neighbourhood change and efforts to ‘scale up’ have influenced the work of RTF activists.

4.4 Challenges in building a right to food movement

4.4.1 Funding dependency

Despite the efforts to engage members of the community in the work of the DTES NH, some staff spoke about the challenges of developing a sustained and mobilized membership due to both the realities of the lives of community members as well as the instability of the organization itself. In recent years the DTES NH has experienced high staff turnover and some staff acknowledged that the nature of working for an understaffed organization with limited resources has caused many people to ‘burn out’. Julie expressed her frustration that this instability was limiting the political potential of the organization:

Over two years we are going to get a third Executive Director. There’s no stability there. The staff turnover has been huge. You know, so if you don’t have a continuum of the same people for at least 3 years you can’t build up a strong political force.

Maria has been on the board of the DTES NH since the creation of the organization and similarly acknowledged the difficulties that a high staff turnover presented in terms of sustaining the momentum of the organization. She also pointed to the need to look beyond the short term funding structure that has left the DTES NH in a position of serious financial instability:

It’s been difficult in terms of, you know, we get a bit of momentum happening, whether it’s board development and committees looking at fundraising and then the momentum kind of stalls when we have changes or it can, and it has. With different positions shifting, and staff shifting and board members shifting, so that’s been a real challenge for the house. And you know, the reliance on grants—we need to look beyond that. Whether it’s social enterprise or some sort of strategic planning with fundraising events and partnerships, strategic partnerships with donors.

The DTES NH does not have core funding and has always depended on grants from the city as well as private donors to fund staff positions and programs. This piecemeal approach to running the organization, not uncommon in the non-profit world, has meant that the DTES NH does not know for certain from one year to the next if it will receive enough money to sustain its programming. As Emma explained in October 2013, the organization has been put in the unfortunate position of having to cut staff hours in order to make it to the end of the year:

This time of the year is always tricky because there's no money coming in—all the grants for the calendar year are pretty much given out, so we're applying. The year has phases like that, so this is application time and money will come in January. But we're not expecting anything now, October, November, December... we're kind of white knuckling it to hope that we can get to the end of the calendar year. And last year we didn't. We had to cut staff hours.

As it turned out, the DTES NH ran into financial trouble in January 2014 that has ultimately resulted in dramatic cuts to staff and program hours. The reliance of the DTES NH on short-term and inconsistent funding seriously limits what the organization is able to offer the community and has obvious implications on staff retention, putting the future of the DTES NH and their work around RTF in a precarious position.

4.4.2 Neighbourhood Change

RTF activists are concerned by the changes underway in the community that pose a threat to the safety and sense of belonging of low-income residents. The rate of change in the neighbourhood and increasing pace of gentrification have put pressure on residents and exacerbated struggles around housing, food and income. In addition to the material realities of displacement, people also experience the emotional toll of neighbourhood change. There is a fear that if the low-income community is displaced from the DTES they will be too far from needed services and support. Linda is involved with the Kitchen Tables Project outreach team, which uses a peer-led

approach to bring nutrition information to community members. She expressed her concern about how gentrification could impact this work:

What really worries me in our outreach work, especially with the Kitchen Tables project, is with the people being forced out, how are we going to reach them? ...They're pushing them so far away from their comfort zone, their central core... because of all these condos going up. And it's like every day; a new high-end restaurant coming in, a new business, and you see the protests down here. People can't afford these restaurants. They're closing the old ones down – I mean, they are not the best places to eat, but you know, what are they going to do?

The DTES NH is perceived by some interviewees to have the potential to be a space where people can collectively define the issues facing low-income community members and work together to find solutions. However, the increasing pressures imposed by gentrification have created tensions within the DTES NH, which is in the almost paradoxical position of being a space for the whole community while advocating against structures that produce inequality and disenfranchise low-income community members, including the forces of gentrification believed to be displacing the poor. The organization has been reluctant to take an official position on developments happening in the community despite the growing concern over the future of the DTES. It is around this issue that there is some divergence in opinion among people affiliated with the DTES NH about the role of the organization. Some believe that as a grassroots organization with a history of political activism, the DTES NH should be more actively working with the low-income community to mobilize against gentrification, while others viewed the DTES NH as more of a mediator in what is perceived to be the inevitable process of gentrification in the DTES. The idea of taking a hardline stance against development was eschewed in favour of a middle-of-the-road approach that could allow the DTES NH to build allies across lines of difference. Allison believes that attempting to work in collaboration with others rather than in opposition is the key to finding solutions that will appease everyone. At the

same time she noted the importance of ensuring that the community is actively involved in the work of the DTES NH:

I think the real challenge is engaging people in a way that they can really own this Neighbourhood House, without having to draw lines in the sand... I think it's pretty easy to get upset and angry about the social injustice that goes on in the neighbourhood, but that approach hasn't gotten us very far, I don't think. I think it's important to challenge the status quo but not to alienate everyone in the process, because we need everyone to find solutions.

Maria emphasized the importance of the mandate of the DTES NH to be an inclusive space for the community, recognizing that neighbourhood change will bring a different demographic into the area. She stated that this spirit of inclusion should continue to be used to bring diverse people together to find common ground:

We need to be true to our mission and vision statements and our lived philosophy is that it's gotta be a welcoming space for everyone. So you know, one of the hopes as this process of gentrification continues is that we could be somewhat of an environment where mutual learning takes place, where mutual respect grows. Information sharing, collaborative problem solving and mutual understanding to some degree. You know, that we could serve as that for folks from various economic and ethnic origins.

Throughout the course of my involvement with the DTES NH, I began to notice differences in opinions between the management of the organization and some of the part-time staff and volunteers over what the role of the DTES NH could be in the community. Perhaps given its grassroots origins, many perceived the DTES NH to be a force of radical change and wanted to see the organization challenging the status quo in both its organizational structure and activism. People in positions of management tended to see this perspective as not being feasible given the limitations placed upon non-profit organizations. As Genevieve, a current staff member of the DTES NH pointed out, there was a need to balance these expectations with the realities of working for an organization with official charitable status:

It's interesting to see what people imagine and dream about this space and it's phenomenal, because I love that the potential seems almost unlimited. But it is somewhat

limited and I think that speaks to how far in some ways the direction of activism can go. And again this isn't something that is clearly articulated in policy, but gentrification and relationships and funding and all that stuff, it's very complicated. We get United Way funding for example. United Way gets a lot of their funding from major corporations. So we are in fact-- like many, if not all, non-profits are beneficiaries of major corporations. So we're a few steps removed from it, but I think it's important to remember that we are in a lot of ways dependent on these structures that we are seeking to dismantle.

Some of the tensions outlined above could be partially attributed to the fact that most of the current full-time staff at the DTES NH are not DTES residents themselves. Like many other organizations in the DTES, the people who occupy management and coordinating positions are white, well educated and middle class. During her interview, Emma acknowledged that it is easier for organizations, including the DTES NH, to follow these hiring patterns rather than critically examine the influence of organizational composition on their work and attempt the change the entire organizational structure. As Genevieve observed, there is some personal tension that comes from her position as a middle class 'outsider' in the community:

I feel a little bit sorry for people who are trying to start a business, who are trying to make food from scratch, who are small business owners who hire people in the community, who want to be a part of something, and then are driven out... I don't have a clearly articulated position on this, and the worst part about it is that I know I'm one of those people that, in many ways, drives gentrification. I'm in an income bracket and from a certain middle-class background... So it's a tension that I also personally face.

It may be difficult for middle-class individuals who have never lived in the DTES to fully appreciate how its gentrification is being felt by residents with lived experiences of poverty. On the other hand, the gentrification of DTES is only one part of a larger phenomenon of growing income inequality in Vancouver that is directly connected to the increasingly unaffordable housing market. The efforts to revitalize the DTES have been motivated to some extent in response to "successful" efforts in other core-area neighbourhoods over the last couple of decades. Allison spoke about feeling a sense of solidarity with the DTES, given that processes of

change are visible in all parts of the city and there is an increasing sense of powerlessness along residents across Vancouver:

I live in a neighbourhood that's adjacent to this one. I feel like I have some alignment with the kinds of influences that are happening in the Downtown Eastside that are not terribly, terribly different from influences in [my neighbourhood]...I think that the city is really changing. I think that the world, the political economy is really playing itself out in the neighbourhood and I think a lot of people are feeling influences way beyond their control that are either pushing them out of their communities or making them feel like they don't fit in their community. And there isn't often a real opportunity to impact our environment.

The staff at the DTES NH has stated their dedication to fighting for the right of residents to remain in the neighbourhood as well as to improve their quality of life, even if there is some division about how this is to be brought about. Many feel optimistic about the potential of the DTES NH to be a force of social change and an influential advocate for RTF in the DTES at scales that extend beyond the neighbourhood. The idea of 'scaling up' RTF work leads to questions about how this can be most effectively accomplished and what the barriers are to building a RTF movement in Vancouver.

4.4.3 'Scaling up' the right to food movement

In terms of the impact of the work of the Neighbourhood House and others around RTF, there was a perception among some interviewees that this idea has had an influence on the practices of food providers and donors. There is a general feeling that the nutritional quality of the food served in the neighbourhood has improved in recent years, and some interviewees speculated that the DTES NH and the Kitchen Tables Project have played at least a small role in this change. Several interviewees highlighted the different ways that the DTES NH has worked to engage organizations and donors, and Jane made the observation that in addition to food providers joining the discussion about improving the quality of food distributed in the DTES, there was

also a growing interest in the wider community to talk about issues related to poverty and food access:

I think right now there's a lot more discussion around nutritional quality... I'm not sure it's so much Downtown Eastside food provider organizations that are creating that dialogue, or if it's a larger dialogue, like academically and the larger food movement that is kind of motivating that. I'm not sure—it's kind of like chicken or egg, right? Or them feeding each other. But regardless I think there's a lot more discussion around the food quality, and the whole idea of right to food.

Whatever the cause of this shift in dialogue may have been, there is certainly a demonstrated interest on the part of the city to at least talk about food access issues. Nicholas acknowledged that the Vancouver Food Policy Council (VFPC) has a history of involvement with RTF work but has recently brought this topic more explicitly onto their agenda, particularly over the last year. Following the visit of the UN Rapporteur on the Right to Food to Canada in 2012 and his subsequent report which criticized the growing prevalence of hunger and failure of the federal government to fulfill its Human Rights commitments, the VFPC invited Jane and Genevieve to present at a monthly meeting. Even over the course of the year that I attended VFPC meetings, there was an observable movement toward the inclusion of topics on the agenda that related to food poverty and access to food. Genevieve commented on this shift, while noting that the members of the council largely cannot relate to the experiences of people living in the DTES:

I feel like the Food Policy Council is doing a really good job at trying to examine right to food and food issues from a much broader lens than I think they have in the past. Most of the people who sit around the table, many are involved in business or you know they have a very different perspective on eating, and it's not about people in poverty. I think that they're willing to explore those issues more in depth, which is great.

Despite the perceived opportunities to scale up the work of RTF to engage a wider audience, interviewees noted several barriers to achieving the work they set out to do. Some stated that the right to food concept felt empty in arenas beyond their community-level work, given how little

regard is given to RTF at the federal and provincial levels. Genevieve questioned the value of organizing around a right that has no real legal recognition in Canada:

I think the notion of human rights is a very Euro-centric, post-world war idea... it kind of breaks my heart because there's nothing behind it in many ways. We can have the dialogue and the UN Rapporteur can come and all this kind of stuff, but at the end of the day, it still is what it is, you know? And no police officer is going to enforce your right to food, which is like the only enforcement mechanism in our society. So in a way it's sort of meaningless and can be very abstract.

For Ben, there was also some tension in drawing on the Universal Declaration of Human Rights as a tool for community organizing due to its inherent contradictions:

That's where it breaks down, is that we all have rights to different material things and independence, freedom, whatever... and the human rights framework to begin with in the UN includes a right to private property. So the body of language that we point to that has that legal precedent of establishing the right to food also has a legal precedent that enshrines as a human right the right to private property. So obviously those two aren't in conflict most of the time, or some of the time, but some of the time they are.

This point has a particular meaning in the current context of the DTES, where the rights of residents and those of developers are increasingly placed in opposition; the right to property is often held up as an entitlement to development despite the fact that this may interfere with the rights of DTES residents to meet their basic needs.

From a policy perspective, Nicholas suggested that the idea of universal rights did not have very much value due to the way that it places responsibility on the federal government to fulfill international obligations. Instead, he believes that the issue of food access should fall under the umbrella of poverty reduction and efforts should be focused on lobbying the provincial government:

I think the big push needs to be at a provincial level. Because federally, yes, you know, [one might] argue that because it's Canada that signed on to these different human rights declarations that they're the right ones to push. But with the way that we currently divide powers, and with the fact that social development or income assistance or whatever our

current government of the day wants to change the letterhead on, falls under provincial government. And so does health, and so do other things like that. To me, it's really something that needs to happen at a provincial level.

The VFPC has a broad mandate to strengthen the regional food system and deal with a variety of issues concerning diverse groups that range from local food production and food waste to Indigenous land rights. That this group is predominantly volunteer-run and their focus is dictated by the people who sit around the table, there is some debate over how effectively they can address the specific food issues facing the DTES. Genevieve suggested that whatever their actual level of influence, there was still value in being involved with the VFPC:

Social change happens when people's stories reach a broader audience... So I think if you really want things to move and you really want greater understanding, you really need to take that message to different people... I don't really know how much influence [the VFPC has] or if it's going to make a difference, but I feel like any avenue that is open to creating more understanding and facilitating a dialogue around things is useful.

Colin had a different perspective of the VFPC and has concluded that it is not, in his view, the mechanism to initiate meaningful conversations around poverty and food access. He cited the limitations imposed by a volunteer council that meets once a month and also expressed concern over the way that lived experiences of poverty become tokenized in spaces dominated by the middle-class:

I struggled to find the opportunities to really animate more than an add on conversation around food access.... They asked me to speak as a member and as a person who interacted with poverty... But there's something weird about that. There's something weird about talking with those folks around my challenges as a child accessing food, and I think it's because when you have few material resources people sometimes think – or people are conditioned to think – you need to tell everyone everything. Or you must tell someone, whether it's a social worker or whatever it is, all of your particulars, where you were, you know, things like that, in a way that people with more resources don't. So there was something that I wrestled with there.

The VFPC allocates seats on the council to people who represent food access and can advocate on behalf of low-income communities; however, Nicholas noted that there have been issues keeping RTF advocates on the council:

So there are these seats, if you can call them that, around access. Unfortunately, and this is just kind of how it's happened, people that we've named, that have been affiliated with the Downtown Eastside Neighbourhood House, who have been huge advocates on this, have sat in those seats and had to leave... I think that has been, as I think about it now, a bit of a challenge in that continuity for moving things forward.

There are of course many reasons why RTF advocates have not remained on the council. It is notable, however, that several interviewees alluded to a sense of disconnect from what is understood as the wider 'food movement' of which food policy councils could be considered a part. One particular piece of this is the continuing emphasis on establishing farmers markets and community gardens as a response to community food insecurity. As Genevieve explained, there tends to be a lack of acknowledgement in the food movement about the limitations of these efforts, specifically in addressing long-term food insecurity produced by poverty:

Farmers markets and community gardens are seen by many people as solutions to food insecurity. And again, I can't state it clearly enough – it's an income issue, right? ...But people are always like, 'Yeah if we just had more community gardens' – that's something that people understand as being needed.

Not only are these initiatives not seen as solutions to hunger by RTF advocates, but there is also a concern about the role of community gardens in processes of gentrification in the DTES. This concern stems from the fact that developers are incentivized to allow community gardens on their empty lots through tax breaks from the city. One prominent example of this in the DTES is the significant tax break that is provided to the developer Concord Pacific for permitting the urban farm/social enterprise SOLEfood to use their land for free while it sits vacant (Vulliamy 2012). Some interviewees from the DTES NH criticized the way that this kind of deal effectively had community members investing energy in improving neighbourhood spaces while benefiting

developers who would eventually remove the garden or farm to build on the lot. Jessica, a former staff of the DTES NH, expressed suspicion that gardens have a positive impact on property values and outside perceptions of the neighbourhood, accelerating processes of gentrification:

In the process of having these farms on their properties, they're actively beautifying the neighbourhood—that's one term that they like to use. Which is making it much more appealing to higher income people coming into the neighbourhood, which in the process of gentrification pushes out the low-income folks.

The Farm Bund, a group that formed at the DTES NH with the goal of finding land in the neighbourhood on which to grow food, confronted these issues when they began to look for space. Ben, another former staff, spoke about the tensions faced by the group, which accompany organizational approaches to community gardening in the DTES:

It was looking like it wasn't possible unless there was some kind of sweet deal with a developer. So then it's like, well there's an ethical question about organizationally if we can do the kind of work we're doing while needing to buddy up with a developer in order to do our work... They couldn't squat the land, or guerrilla garden because again, you can't attach the Neighbourhood House's name to it, because it's civil disobedience... it was looking like all the land that was available was from a developer. And they get a tax break for having temporary community gardens on their land while they let the land grow in speculative value. Which then it kind of increases the pressure of knowing that none of this urban farming land will be permanent.

None of the interviewees expressed an opposition to community gardens and many spoke about the value of having space in the neighbourhood for residents to learn how to grow food as well as interact with neighbours. Julie and David both have community garden plots in the DTES and consider this connection to nature to be fundamental to their physical and mental well-being. However, the concerns of some interviewees suggest that community gardens may also have an insidious influence in the DTES that is generally overlooked in the broader dialogue of the local food movement.

Another dimension of the food movement that Jane identified is the conversation that is developing around food waste and the emphasis that has been placed on food recovery as a way to address hunger while saving food from the landfill. Jane suggests that this not only ignores the danger that old or expired food poses to the many people in the DTES with compromised immune systems but also distracts from more important questions about how food waste is generated and why it is considered acceptable to give this food to poor people:

[Food recovery is] a movement in the food world that's... a little concerning and alarming. In terms of the food that people are accessing – like being able to purchase, that affordability and nutritional quality aspect of food – I think is being talked about more and more. But there are still lots of people who are focused on food recovery and it's again not looking at the unequal distribution of food and why people have to rely on that food recovery or food donations. It's still constantly talking about all this food wastage, and how do we capitalize on that. And it's like, why do people need to rely on food donations to begin with?

The dissonance between the food movement in Vancouver and the RTF vision creates tensions for DTES activists who wish to participate in the local food discourse. This suggests that there is a need for RTF to intervene in the discourse and disrupt normative understandings of how to approach food insecurity by explicitly linking the issues of poverty, housing and the entrenchment of the charitable food system to the incidence of hunger in the DTES.

This chapter has demonstrated how RTF has equipped people in the community with a locally situated counter narrative that has attempted to tie food insecurity to a broader sociopolitical critique of neoliberal urbanization. Community spaces such as the DTES NH advance RTF by providing dignified interactions with food as well as opportunities to build social cohesion and solidarity through the sharing of meals. The factors that produce and perpetuate food insecurity are complexly intertwined and are strongly tied to the broader disenfranchisement of DTES residents, meaning that an RTF movement must somehow work to bring all of these issues

together. Building this movement requires an engagement with issues at multiple scales, including the issues of funding dependency of non-profit organizational models, the politics of land use in the DTES and the influences of the prevailing ‘local food’ discourse at the municipal level. Recognizing both the current strengths and challenges of RTF work allows for an analysis of how these efforts could benefit from linking more explicitly to historical contestations over urban space and the collective struggles facing wider efforts to reclaim the city.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION & CONCLUSION

The proliferation of food insecurity in urban areas and the concomitant community-led responses have received attention from geographers seeking to understand how these locally-situated initiatives both help and hinder efforts to strengthen food security and create more just urban food geographies. At the same time the resurgent interest in the right to the city (RTC) has provided a way of understanding how the structural inequities of the neoliberal city might be challenged through both everyday activities and collective resistance to reclaim and remake the city for all urban inhabitants. While RTC has captured the imaginations of academics and activists alike, there remains a need to continue identifying and exploring practical applications of this concept as well as refining theoretical understandings about what kind of right RTC represents. Efforts to reclaim or remake local food systems present an opportunity to conceptually link RTC with work ‘on the ground,’ although to date this connection remains under examined. This thesis provides a unique contribution by drawing links between the right to food (RTF) and RTC, building a conceptual bridge while identifying potential pitfalls, that can perhaps help to produce new understandings about both ideas.

This chapter will first identify how the denial of DTES residents’ RTF is imbricated in the disenfranchisement of residents from their broader RTC. I will then focus on three proposed ‘targets’ of the RTF movement in the DTES and draw on the results presented in the preceding chapter as well as existing literature. The first target relates to the ways in which class and race divisions exist within the food movement in Vancouver and the role that RTF can play in

confronting this both in the community and at a broader level. The second target is the instability of the DTES NH in the context of ‘scaling up’ and movement building within a non-profit organizational framework, highlighting both the opportunities as well as obstacles. The third target is the demonstrated influence of using the language of rights as a counter-narrative as well as a tool to create autonomous space in the DTES, suggesting that further engagement with how activists understand and practice RTF points to how this work can be connected to RTC. The chapter concludes with a discussion of how adopting the lens of RTC can support RTF activists in addressing all three areas, thereby strengthening and ‘scaling up’ the RTF movement both within and outside of the DTES.

5.1 The DTES food system as a violation of the right to the city

As outlined in Chapter 2, RTC represents a collective right for urban inhabitants to decide how urban space is produced and used. Distinct from and more radical than liberal-democratic notions of rights, RTC is realized through the expression of participation and appropriation (Purcell 2002). This means that urban inhabitants, not the state or capital, should have a central and direct role in decision-making over the production of urban space. As well, inhabitants should also have the ability to access, occupy, use, and not be alienated from space in the city. In short, RTC entails the re-making of the city as a space of human inhabitation and flourishing rather than capital accumulation by dispossession (Harvey 2013).

Based on the findings in Chapter 4, it is evident that the current food system in the DTES does not support, and in some cases directly contravenes, the right of residents to make use of the city in the provision of their food in a way that preserves their health and dignity. The charitable

model of food provision has been implicated in the ‘weaponization’ of food, wherein the distribution of food within inner city spaces becomes a method of ‘power over’, used as both a reward and punishment to inflect people’s urban geographies in harmful ways. In many ways, the existing model has been shown to have detrimental effects on the physical, mental and emotional health of DTES residents through the provision of insufficient and inappropriate nutrition made available through undignified experiences. From a RTC perspective, the punitive effects of the charitable mentality are productive in the sense that they perpetuate residents’ alienation from urban space while paving the way for their displacement through urban renewal. This model tends to extinguish the potential that food has to build social relationships and a sense of community. Further, there are a number of ways that the food system supports or is connected to existing power imbalances. Charity relies on the benevolence of individuals with relative material wealth and can do little to mobilize a critical examination of social inequality, thereby reinforcing the class power of urban elites. The landscape of the DTES itself has become a material representation of the overt power of capital and the ‘creative class’ to produce urban space, which is in part illustrated by the proliferation of high-end restaurants catering to adventurous poverty tourists (Burnett 2013).

Food is a basic and necessary resource and is required by people in order to perform the functions of daily life – the basis of social reproduction. Understood in this way, access to food plays a critical and multifaceted role in determining who is (un)able to participate in and appropriate urban space. While the theory of RTC permits us to see how residents are disenfranchised by the current food system in the DTES, it can at the same time be an instructive tool in understanding potential pathways toward the creation of a more spatially just food

system. In the following sections, I will explore this dual role of RTC by drawing on the experiences of people involved in RTF activism.

5.2 The divisive influence of food in the DTES

At the community level, the lack of culturally appropriate food and the racial tensions that have manifested themselves in the systems of food distribution need to be historically contextualized, taking into account the historic human rights abuses and struggles that have taken place in the neighbourhood. This perspective allows for an analysis of how the present-day socio-economic inequities, including the denial of RTF among the materially poor, are the products of a history of colonialism, racial exclusion and displacement. Interviewees talked about the importance of regaining food traditions in Indigenous communities as a necessary part of healing from experiences of colonization and forced assimilation policies that were designed to destroy the cultural fabric of communities. While a meaningful discussion about decolonizing food provision in the DTES cannot be done justice within the scope of this thesis, it is worthwhile to consider how the structures and practices of many DTES organizations mirror colonial power relations and question how this might influence practices of food distribution and delivery in the neighbourhood. Several interviewees pointed to the overrepresentation of middle-class white people in coordinating positions at DTES organizations, including the DTES NH, which points to some issues concerning organizational dynamics that warrant continued attention from advocates of RTF.

Some of my observations of the work of the DTES NH suggest that there is a possible disconnect between the principles upon which the organization was founded and its current practices.

Initiatives such as Banana Beat were illustrative of how the stated purpose of affirming the

dignity of residents and intervening in the ‘line up’ mentality of the neighbourhood was undermined by practices that mirrored the charitable model and contributed to divisions within the community. The ways in which the community of the DTES seems to be divided along racial lines is a concern for those involved in RTF work, particularly in terms of how organizations in the community address these issues. Many Chinese elders living in the DTES struggle with poverty and finding affordable housing, which are shared concerns for many in the community; however, the means by which resources such as food are distributed in the neighbourhood have set up relationships of competition rather than compassion between neighbours and in some cases fueled racism directed at Chinese elders. This situation has captured the attention of DTES organizations, including the DTES NH, as well as the media (Fong 2014), yet the general lack of information about the needs of the elderly Chinese community as well as the few culturally specific resources available to them has made it difficult for organizations to respond to the intercultural tensions in the community in an appropriate way. The interim report published by a coalition of DTES organizations also demonstrates a lack of community will or capacity to take action to develop alternatives to traditional methods of food delivery, focusing on the individuals in the lineups as the source of the tensions rather than the lineup itself.

The circumstances described by people engaged in RTF activism in the DTES reveal that there is also a perceived disconnect between the focus and priorities of their work and the broader food movement in Vancouver. Interviewees cited the common perception from the general public that farmers markets and community gardens are solutions to food insecurity, echoing Miewald & McCann’s (2013) assertion that urban food policies have contributed to “hegemonic discourses” (4) which laud ‘green’ initiatives while failing to look at the structural causes of food insecurity.

The municipal-level enthusiasm for urban agriculture takes on a different meaning for some in the DTES, where community gardens are tangled up in the politics of land use and gentrification (Quastel 2009), and many residents are battling physical and mental health issues, preventing them from participating in community gardening activities. The limited representation of people experiencing barriers to food access at the policy level and the tendency for these experiences to be superficially addressed was also highlighted by an interviewee. The disconnect between the food movement and the work of RTF activists is apparent in documents such as the *Vancouver Food Strategy*, which recognizes the structural issues, including income inequality and social polarization, that perpetuate inequitable food access in the city yet advances market-based initiatives such as farmers markets and programs such as community kitchens, which focus on individual skill building as the means to address the problem.

These findings add to Gibb & Wittman's (2012) claim that there are "parallel food networks" in Vancouver, an argument they established by comparing a predominantly white and affluent local food movement to the historic and ongoing contributions of Chinese Canadians who make up a large percentage of local food producers. The authors argue that the racialization of Chinese Canadians is a limiting factor to their participation in the dominant food movement, which largely caters to the ideals and practices of white producers and consumers, rendering Chinese Canadian farmers invisible in the history of the movement despite their considerably high level of involvement in agriculture in the Metro Vancouver area. Gibb & Wittman assert that in order to truly work toward an inclusive food system we must confront the history, contradictions and racialization within the food movement. Similarly, in the United States Guthman (2008a) has examined how local food discourses valorize white bodies and normative assumptions, which

allows whites to “continue to define the rhetoric, spaces, and broader projects of agro-food transformation” (395).

Together these analyses offer a cautionary warning for all food system activists to reflexively examine the role of their own work, remaining cognizant of the ways in which spaces and practices are coded and how this can produce exclusion and inequitable access to the benefits brought about by the alternative food movement. There is certainly a need to apply this lens to the work happening in Vancouver at the municipal level by asking whose voices and interests are being represented as the city endeavours to improve its food system. The prioritization of urban agriculture and food retail as the means to improve food access in the *Food Strategy* report, as well as only a vague promise to “facilitate the transition from a charitable food model to one based on principles of a just and sustainable food system” (COV 2013a, 122) without providing a plan for how such a transformation could take place suggests that there is a need for deeper engagement with the experiences and ideas of those who face the greatest barriers to food access. On the topic of urban agriculture, Reynolds (2014) has cautioned that the tendency of academics and local food actors to portray urban agriculture as being inherently tied to social justice while ignoring its limitations in dismantling underlying structural inequities can obscure the ways in which racial and class oppression is perpetuated. Further, in their examination of the growing food justice movements in the United States, Agyeman & McIntee (2014) have observed that state co-option of the language and concepts used by food justice advocates has contributed to the legitimization of market-based approaches to food insecurity, thereby weakening the more radical food justice agenda and supporting the continued withdrawal of government responsibility for social welfare. These are important considerations for Vancouver, where the

current municipal priorities will continue to legitimize food security projects including gardens, farmers markets and community kitchens, despite the fact that RTF activists have stated that these initiatives fail to address the complex interdependence between poverty, housing and nutritional vulnerability in the DTES.

RTC is a collective right to be claimed by all urban inhabitants; in the context of contemporary urban neoliberalization, all urban inhabitants are seen to be equally alienated from the city, albeit the manifestation of this alienation occurs in distinct ways depending on class position. While the middle class are encumbered with ever-higher rents and mortgages, the poor face ever-more creative forms of urban revanchism that deprives them of the determinants of health, including food, housing, and social support. Procedurally, the urbanization process itself is left to the market, where urban space is enrolled increasingly for the generation of shareholder profits over local people's livelihoods.

RTC demands that people connect across lines of class, race, and social difference, recognizing the common cause of their varied experiences of alienation. As one way to build solidarity among urban citizens, RTF activism can work to implicate the current models of food distribution and provision in the DTES within the historical context of oppression, divestment, dispossession and colonization in the neighbourhood and point to the specific ways in which different cultural groups in the DTES are affected, while at the same time recognizing the internal diversity of experiences within cultural groups. Linking the denial of RTF of DTES inhabitants to historical and ongoing processes of racial and class oppression, including an analysis of how various oppressions intersect with each other, presents a means for RTF activists to further intervene at the community and municipal level, highlighting the ways in which

prevailing discourses ignore the needs, values, and wellbeing of the most marginalized. This analysis would also make a necessary contribution to the work of grassroots groups such as Raise the Rates (Raise the Rates 2013), which has built a campaign that focuses primarily on how the inadequacy of social assistance rates interferes with individuals' abilities to meet their needs while largely failing to acknowledge the role that structural and systemic issues such as racism can compound inequitable access to resources.

5.3 'Scaling up' and movement building

There are many reasons to doubt that a transformative social movement can be built within the framework of a non-profit organization. The harshest critics of non-profit organizations claim that the very creation of registered non-profits has been an attempt by the state to surveil and sublate radical social movements through funding schemes that demand competition between organizations for short-term grants and contribute to the professionalization of activists (Smith 2007). Smith (2007) argues that this system has produced increasingly specialized organizations that are constantly asked to prove their worth to funders through measurable results, thereby allowing them the capacity only to address the symptoms of much larger social issues.

Organizations operating within this framework tend to be staffed by members with social and economic privilege, for example those who have access to education and can meet the demands of complicated grant applications (Smith 2007). Under neoliberalization, both traditional charities and non-profit organizations engaged in social justice work are filling the gap left by the retrenched state and the failures of the market in social welfare provision. However, these organizations are at the same time limited in their ability to significantly disrupt the prevailing social order or create structural change.

The funding and capacity issues that have plagued the DTES NH almost since its inception raise questions about its ability to build a RTF movement and significantly transform the DTES food system. Wilson Gilmore (2007) has looked at how grassroots groups that eventually formally incorporated – as the DTES NH did in 2009 - tend to receive grants that support short-term projects rather than guaranteed core funding, which has the effect of stifling the social and economic critiques that form the foundations of many of these groups as well as constraining the work of broad social mobilization. Arguing that “organizations are only as good as the united fronts they bring into being” (51), she posits that grassroots organizations should focus their energy on building relationships with likely allies in order to have the power to enact meaningful change. This analysis certainly has some relevance to the DTES NH, where staff have explicitly acknowledged the tension of depending on funding from corporations with whom they have significant ideological differences and how the precariousness of this funding has made it challenging to even keep their doors open, let alone engage in activism or movement building. Several interviewees from the DTES NH indicated a preference for cooperation with others in the community over the adoption of ‘hardline’ stances on issues that could potentially alienate organizations with less radical politics. However, given the seemingly dire position of the DTES NH, it is perhaps a decisive moment to be thinking about concentrating on strategic partnerships with groups who are the most ideologically aligned with the organization and could help to support and strengthen RTF work.

Questioning the capacity of the DTES NH to bring about social change is not intended to dismiss the work that the organization has already accomplished. Interviewees did indicate a belief that

the RTF work of the DTES NH and others has had a positive influence on the organizational practices of food provision in the DTES in terms of improving the nutritional quality of food available and shifting the model of food delivery away from the traditional line-up toward an open door system, a point which is supported by the findings of Miewald & McCann (2013) in their research on the foodscapes of DTES residents. Perhaps just as importantly, the material space of the DTES NH was described by interviewees and others who I spoke to informally as being distinctly different from many of the other organizations within the community. The sense of ownership, belonging and inclusivity felt by people at the DTES NH that was often highlighted is likely the result of the intentional efforts of current and former staff and volunteers to create a space where food would serve as the focal point of dignified and celebratory interactions between neighbours rather than simply being a mechanism of survival. It is the role of food at the DTES NH and the environment that has been cultivated around it that provides a pathway into understanding where the strengths of the organization lie and how these can potentially be used to build on the RTF movement. Is it worth also noting here the impact on shifting priorities beyond the community?

RTC theorists, particularly Harvey and Lefebvre, who have examined the relationship between urban space and resistance emphasize the importance of material spaces where urban inhabitants can come together and create an “alternative social experience that challenges the prevailing alienation of people from their physical and social environments” (Eizenburg 2012, 778). Through collective action, these sites allow people to explore new urban realities through alternative arrangements of space and social relations. Though this analysis of urban space tends to be reserved for reclaimed or appropriated public spaces, the ways in which the space of the

DTES NH emerged and has been shaped by the collective visions and labour of community members make it possible to see how the space of the organization has characteristics of the urban commons. While operating within the limitations of a non-profit organizational framework and the commodified landscape of the neoliberal city, people at the DTES NH have carved out a space where the daily activity of sharing meals is paired with an explicit assertion that the community has a right to a particular standard of food, thereby opening up space for social relations through food that DTES residents may have few opportunities to experience elsewhere. As mentioned by several interviewees, the fact that so many in the community are unhoused or underhoused means that the traditional designation of particular activities accorded to public and private spaces, implicitly understood in other communities, does not necessarily exist in the DTES. Like the public street, the space inside of the DTES NH can serve not only as a living room but also a kitchen for people in the community, providing the space and resources that support the necessary activities of social reproduction. At the same time, the DTES NH also serves as a site for interactions between individuals from diverse backgrounds and could be considered a ‘contact zone’, where “class actors are engaged in critical learning about the links between privilege and injustice” (Lawson 2014, 214), facilitating the transformation of social relationships. This development of solidarity across lines of social difference is a fundamental part of building and strengthening the RTF movement founded in the DTES.

There is an obvious difference between carving out space within an existing inequitable system and dismantling the system altogether, with the latter requiring a much higher degree of citizen mobilization and vast networks of solidarity. However, that is not to say that choosing to work within the system necessarily impedes the processes that fuel social justice movements.

Chatterton & Pickerill (2010) have examined the various ways that activists simultaneously work within and are constrained by the existing social system while struggling to resist and move beyond it through the creation of what the authors refer to as ‘autonomous geographies’ - spaces “where there is a questioning of the laws and social norms of society and a creative desire to constitute non-capitalist, collective forms of politics, identity, and citizenship” (1). The authors assert that to understand the emancipatory potential of these spaces, post-capitalism must be conceptualized not as an identifiable end point but rather an ever evolving project driven by everyday resistance, taking up Gibson-Graham’s (2006) idea that the work of post-capitalism is in fact the continual remaking and strengthening of space to safeguard it from that which threatens its existence. Similarly, in her analysis of the relationship between everyday resistance and social movements, Creasap (2012) propounds that the ‘real’ political work of social movements is not only the activities that happen within a space, but also involves the ongoing processes of creating and defending space itself. These ideas provide a compelling perspective with which to examine the space of the DTES NH, where the activities of food provisioning, relationship building, political engagement and even the ongoing struggle to keep the doors open can be understood as attempts to create new social relations, political identities and experiences of space that seek to challenge prevailing forces of capitalism. It would be naïve, however, to suggest that the DTES NH has been immune to the influences of neoliberalization, which have caused the professionalization and institutionalization of grassroots groups and have had the effect of fragmenting social movements and distancing formal organizations from community level mobilizing that happens outside of this framework (Mayer 2010). For all the promise that the DTES NH holds within the walls of the organization, there is significant work that needs to be done in order to produce meaningful change in the DTES food system.

It can be argued that one dimension of the work of the DTES NH that will affect the degree to which the organization is able to support a transformative RTF movement in the DTES is how those involved conceptualize RTF. In the day-to-day work of activists, it is not uncommon to take ideology for granted and not explicitly interrogate political positions, which leads to a lack of perspective and discussion about relative positions within broader socio-institutional systems (Chatterton & Pickerell 2010). Interviewees raised a number of different philosophical and practical understandings of RTF which ranged from what could be considered ‘progressive’, focusing on pushing for gradual reforms to the DTES food system, to more ‘radical’ perspectives that demand the de-commodification of food and redistribution of ecological and social resources. While the official stance of the DTES NH is more aligned with the former than the latter, it is worthwhile to consider if such an approach goes far enough to support RTF for DTES residents, given the fact that enabling long-term, secure and dignified access to adequate food for all individuals will arguably require a fundamental restructuring of our current political, social and economic system. Engaging with RTC provides an expansive perspective on how RTF might be conceptualized in order to best support the current work of the DTES NH while provoking ideas for a more transformative politics.

5.4 Conceptualizing the right to food through the right to the city

Interviewees spoke about how RTF armed them with a vocabulary that could be used to subvert the dominant discourse of the charity model. For some, RTF provided a language with which to confront injustices they experienced in the neighbourhood while for others it provoked them to think about the politics of food and charity from a new perspective. RTF is particularly powerful

because it challenges terms such as food insecurity by placing the burden of blame on political systems and structural oppression rather than individuals. It is this emancipatory quality of the rights discourse that gives it the powerful potential to mobilize people across communities.

Underlining this point, Blomley & Pratt (2001, 152) draw on the work of Laclau & Mouffe (1985) to contend that the rights discourse can reframe understandings of power, stating:

Rights are unique in offering a political yardstick that allows power relations previously understood as organic and natural to be reframed as political and conditional. Subordination can be recast as oppression, and thus politicized.

The language of rights has had more traction in the DTES than other concepts commonly used in food system activism such as ‘food justice’ or ‘food sovereignty’ because it directly challenges the language and attitudes typically employed within the dominant neoliberal charity discourse and perhaps also engages more closely with other rights struggles so ingrained in the collective consciousness of the community. At the same time, some RTF activists have admitted that organizing around the language of rights at times feels meaningless due to the blatant lack of formal recognition of RTF demonstrated at different levels of government, despite its many international commitments to eliminate hunger. This sentiment was expressed even at the municipal level where the Vancouver Food Policy Council, while embracing the RTF discourse, has suggested that mobilizing around this idea may not be the most politically powerful approach. It is here that theorizing around RTC may illuminate how RTF should be conceptualized and why the rights discourse should continue to be engaged with rather than cast aside.

Harvey (2008) acknowledges the contemporary popularity of the human rights discourse in many arenas, which is often used as a platform to promote ideas of social equality. He argues that the

failure of dominant framings of these concepts is due to the fact that they “do not fundamentally challenge hegemonic liberal and neoliberal market logics” (23) through the privileging of private property rights and profit over all other rights. The UN especially champions notions of rights that do not upset the current political and economic order and has even managed to co-opt RTC and subsume it under a “neoliberal development agenda” (Kuymulu 2013, 293). It is no surprise then, that DTES RTF activists express disillusionment with the notion of RTF; the depoliticizing, individualizing and decontextualizing tendencies of the dominant human rights narratives strip the concept of all its radical potential to actually bring about change in a fundamentally unjust system.

RTC has been employed as a concept within a vast array of academic scholarship, highlighting the diversity of urban struggles that can fall under the umbrella this concept. RTC is a collective right, which rests on a general critique of the processes of urban planning and policy that give disproportionate control over urban resources to private interests. As Atttoh (2011) points out, RTC has at different times been conceptualized as a right to citizenship, a right to occupy public space, a right to participate in urban planning, a protective right against police brutality, and a socioeconomic right (the right to housing or food, for instance). The conceptual broadness of RTC can be understood as a strength that can be used to build solidarity between diverse struggles of urban populations through the identification of common basic needs and demands (Mitchell & Heynen 2009). RTC is not meant to align with traditional liberal or neoliberal democratic rights nor does it suggest that increasing the formal participation of socio-economically marginalized populations in pre-established political systems will bring about justice. Rather, RTC demands a new kind of politics altogether. Purcell (2013) has rearticulated

Lefebvre's notion of rights to suggest that rather than seeing a right as an 'end goal' which is achieved through the enactment of laws, rights should be understood as the springboard for a process of political struggle and a critical moment of 'awakening' for people to become aware of and exercise their collective power. With this understanding, the radical democracy at the centre of RTC is thus not an end result to be realized but is instead an ongoing struggle toward an ever-present horizon, the continual search for alternatives to capitalist state institutions and the evolving vision for a just urban society.

Building on this conceptualization of rights, RTF should perhaps not be seen as a liberal democratic right but a tool to highlight the disenfranchisement of people from the city. Patel, Balakrishnan and Narayan's (2007) examination of the rights discourse within La Via Campesina, a global grassroots peasant movement organized around food sovereignty, offers a particularly illuminating perspective on what kind of right RTF should be. La Via Campesina claims the right to food sovereignty for members of the federation, though it is strategically vague about how this right is defined which allows for the mobilization of a diverse membership while acknowledging the importance for communities to fill rights with meaning. In this way, La Via Campesina has built a widespread and united movement that also supports the self-determination of its membership through "a transgressive use of the discourse of rights" (91). Drawing on the work of the peasant movement, the authors state that the real importance of rights discourse lies in its role as a tool of social mobilization, without which the legal enforcement of rights is meaningless. In the DTES, the true power of RTF has indeed been the way it allows people in the community to articulate observed injustices in the food system. It has served people in the community and particularly at the DTES NH with an effective tool for

organizing and bringing together a diverse membership. Initiatives such as the community-led development and distribution of a DTES Food Charter highlight how RTF has been locally defined and used in a practical sense to equip people in the community with tools to confront injustice and disenfranchisement. The recognition of RTF through formal political or legal channels is certainly secondary to its utility for mobilizing people at the community level.

RTF has been (and needs to be) defined by people in the DTES through locally-situated understandings, but using the lens of RTC can help RTF activists clearly articulate how the injustices in the food system are symptoms of neoliberal processes of urbanization, be it the emergence of a charitable sector which relies on the unpaid labour of DTES residents, the proliferation of restaurants and other businesses catering to an urban elite, the legacies of sub-standard housing and lack of community facilities that accommodate the preparation and sharing of meals or the co-option of urban agriculture and ‘green’ discourses by private developers. RTC demands that we see all of the identified issues in the DTES food system as being connected to the broader disenfranchisement of low income residents from their right to participate in and appropriate urban space. As Shillington (2013) has argued, struggles for RTF in cities can be seen as a claim over the right to urban metabolism, or the “co-transformation of social and ‘natural’ elements into particular social and ‘natural’ urban forms and relations” (106), a process that is always fraught with multiple meanings and competing discourses, producing uneven socio-environmental outcomes such as inequitable and unjust food geographies. Claiming the right to urban metabolism can be likened to claiming RTC, in that it reconceives the city as an ongoing process that can be taken up by marginalized urban populations on a daily basis as they find ways to meet their needs within systems from which they have largely been excluded. In the

DTES, the scattered and independent efforts by community members to organize community meals in SROs is one way that residents assert their right to urban metabolism in a community where the dominant system of food provision generally does not facilitate or allow for developing social relationships through the sharing of meals. Identifying and supporting struggles for the right to urban metabolism at the community level and beyond presents one way that RTF activists might go about building and strengthening a movement for a more just food geography in the DTES.

Similar to Atttoh's call for geographers to refine the idea of what kind of right RTC is, and how to negotiate the inevitability of rights coming into conflict with each other, RTF activists must also work to explicitly define what kind of right RTF is and how the realization of this right might collide with other rights, particularly those related to private property. The current regime of property ownership and the accompanying processes of gentrification underway in the DTES pose a direct threat not only to low-income residents' RTF but also their right to the city through processes of displacement and dispossession (Blomley 2003). Staff at the DTES NH may be reluctant to take an official stance against development and gentrification in the community; however, it could be argued that explicitly defining RTF as a right that takes precedence over private property rights would be a step toward confronting the internalized preference shown to property owners in urban planning and politics (Bedore 2013). Defending RTF in the DTES must be seen as an attempt to intervene in the processes that are not only altering the food geography of the neighbourhood but also threatening a sense of belonging and the right of residents to remain in their community (Miewald & McCann 2013).

5.5 Study Limitations

Ramirez (2014) emphasizes the importance for academics and activists in critical food studies to decenter the ‘white subject’, to disrupt the prevailing notion that the white values and ideals which tend to permeate the alternative food movement are desirable for all communities. The majority of participants in my research were white, a factor that was in part influenced by the use of the DTES NH as the primary site of my research. Most of the former and present staff of the DTES NH are white, well-educated and live outside of the DTES. I must acknowledge that in drawing primarily on these relatively privileged perspectives, my work does not succeed in decentering the white subject as the primary actor in community food security. In the later stages of my research, as I reflected on my growing familiarity with people at the DTES NH and the neighbourhood, I began to understand that my experiences and understandings would always be interpreted through a perspective created both by my positionality (Rose 1997) and relationships to others in the community, writing:

When I think about being in this space, in this community, I recognize that as much as my understanding of this environment is filtered through my own experience and position, it is a relational process as well that is shaped by the people who I happen to encounter, as well as those I don't. Depending on where I go, with whom I associate, the organizations that I choose to become involved in, I could probably have a thousand different understandings of the same place. (Research journal, December 2013)

Recognizing the limitations that the omission of a wider or more diverse set of perspectives imposes on my research, I have endeavored to not make assumptions or authoritative claims about how the food system of the DTES *should* be. It is my hope that, if anything, this research has demonstrated the necessity of ensuring that communities define their own needs and demands. Any future attempts to understand how to improve access to food in the DTES should place the voices of DTES residents at the centre of the conversation.

5.6 Conclusion

This thesis represents an attempt to take up Purcell's (2013) call to "document and narrate" the instances where urban inhabitants recognize their power and autonomy. While the DTES NH and its work around RTF is not necessarily a case study of urban inhabitants claiming RTC, it does provide insight into the potential venues for a new kind of urban politics. The DTES NH offers a space that is somewhat unique to the DTES, where food provision serves as both a tool and a backdrop to attempt to bring about new social relations and political identities. If, as Purcell suggests, we must seek out, learn to recognize and help to spread community efforts to reclaim power, this research is the culmination of such an effort.

The politics of food in the DTES is situated in a broader picture of social and spatial injustice; interviewees identified a number of overlapping issues that influenced food access, with adequate and affordable housing being a prominent barrier. Because the struggle to create more social housing in the neighbourhood is so intertwined with the politics of land use and private development, struggles over RTF are inextricably tied to struggles over how urban space is produced and used. The inescapable fact is that capitalism has profound socioeconomic and socionatural impacts on the development of urban space and this phenomenon directly contributes to the production of 'hunger' in cities (Heynen 2006). Thus, efforts at the municipal and local level that confine the problem of urban food insecurity to being a 'food system' issue, or suggest that it is remediable through food security initiatives such as community gardens and farmers markets, will continue to overlook the fact that without significant structural change, nutritional vulnerability will continue to be a reality for those with the least political, social and economic power. Even activist groups who focus on increasing social assistance to support

equitable economic access to food fall short by failing to address the fundamental inequities at the heart of capitalist neoliberalism.

As an organization with grassroots origins and community credibility, which emerged in response to a community-identified concern and whose work is rooted in the struggle for survival confronted daily by residents of the DTES, the DTES NH has shown the potential to be a force of mobilization and social change in the DTES. This is an inherently multi-scalar struggle and thus organizing a movement around RTF will require activists to ‘scale up’ their work. One important aspect of this is establishing alliances with ideologically aligned groups at the grassroots level, both within and outside of the community, and maintaining a strong sense of solidarity and engagement with the everyday resistances of marginalized community members who represent the ‘frontline’ of urban struggles. Of particular importance is finding ways to build networks of support and make space for a diverse membership, including First Nations people and Chinese Canadians while historically contextualizing and confronting racialization both in local food practices and the broader food movement. RTF activists should continue the important work of intervening in community and municipal level discourses through participation in formal political channels but also search for radical alternatives to the existing unjust system.

If we can claim that “new social relations call for new space and vice versa”, and if activists want to bring about transformation in the food system that is built on new social relations of dignity, agency and respect, RTF must therefore be understood as a spatial project of claiming

the collective right to the city, engaging with all dimensions of the production and reproduction of social and material space.

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APPENDIX A: ETHICS PROTOCOL AND APPROVAL

1. Project Summary: Realizing the Right to the City through the Right to Food? An exploration of community food activism in Vancouver's Downtown Eastside

Purpose. The focus of my proposed research is to examine the way in which 'the right to food' (RTF) is understood and employed by community food activists in Vancouver's downtown eastside (DTES) neighbourhood. I intend to embed this study in a critical historical analysis to reveal how discursive and material processes have contributed to the dominant responses to food insecurity, whose failure has contributed to the emergence of a right to food movement within the neighbourhood. Specifically, I want to explore the extent to which localized efforts succeed in 'scaling up' their critiques of the prevailing structural inequities in neighbourhood level food systems into a broader geographical context of 'the right to the city' (Harvey 2013).

Methods and objectives. Using a critical ethnographic approach (Thomas 2003), I will focus on the work of the Downtown Eastside Neighbourhood House (DTES NH), a community non-profit whose mandate is to provide a supportive and welcome environment and food-related programming for local residents, to investigate the ways in which staff, volunteers and community members have mobilized a RTF philosophy to address community food insecurity. My objectives are: (1) to examine the historical context of food insecurity and activism in the DTES; and (2) to investigate the role and influence of the DTES NH in advancing a right to food approach to food insecurity in the DTES, and (3) To interrogate, using a critical discourse analysis of textual materials, field notes and interview data, the scalar dimensions of RTF activism as a broader geographical claim to 'the right to the city' that confronts exclusionary urban dynamics/changes in Vancouver. To meet these objectives, I will undertake a textual analysis of relevant materials as well as interview local inhabitants and food activists involved with the work of the DTES NH.

(Phase 1) *Historical contextualization of RTF.* To meet my first objective, I will complete a textual analysis (Jäger & Maier 2009) using newspaper archives, policy documents and published community and academic reports in order to gain an understanding of the historical context and policy developments that have produced socioeconomic and spatial inequities in the DTES and the resulting development of discourse and action around food insecurity in the area.

(Phase 2) *RTF activism in everyday life.* To meet my second objective, I will spend a period of 10 months living in proximity to the DTES and volunteering at the DTES NH. I will employ a combination of participant observation (Guest et al. 2013), semi-structured interviews (Turner 2010) with key stakeholders at the DTES NH to ascertain the working dynamics of RTF activism in both formal (programming, advocacy, inter-organizational collaborations) and informal (conversational, relational) contexts. I anticipate conducting approximately 15 one hour-long interviews with former and current employees, volunteers or members of the community who visit the DTES NH to document the ways in which local actors are working with RTF concepts at the community and municipal level. Finally, I will employ a critical analysis of the right to the city framework to determine the extent to which local actors are mobilizing against the structural inequities responsible for the ongoing reproduction of the spatially unjust city. I will present the preliminary findings of the research at a gathering open to

the community and attendees will be invited to comment on and contribute to the results, thereby strengthening the credibility of the research (Baxter & Eyles 1997).

Anticipated Outcomes. This study will be of particular interest to other researchers and community activists who are working to address social justice issues in the food system from a rights-based perspective. Project partners and other interested organizations will be provided with a plain language community report that includes an executive summary of the research results.

2. Research Instruments

The proposed project will take place primarily at the DTES NH, where I have been volunteering for several programs since April 2013. I will be using a combination of participant observation and one-on-one interviews using a semi-structured interview guide (Appendix B: Interview guide).

Participant Observation. Throughout the project, I will record detailed field notes about my observations and interactions with others at the NH (DeWalt & DeWalt 2010). I will also employ an ethnographic interviewing technique known as “contextualized conversations” in which information is obtained from research participants without the use of predetermined questions and instead follows the natural flow of conversations (Stage & Mattson 2003). The purpose of these methods is to gain detailed insight into how mobilization around the right to food occurs at the local level and how this is contextualized in the broader socio-political dynamics of the DTES. I acknowledge that some of the information collected could be considered sensitive by those who I am observing and I will take measures to respect their privacy by removing identifying information and submitting my field notes to participants to give them the opportunity to make comments, amendments or deletions to the text. In an effort to make my work as transparent as possible, I will explicitly state my role as a researcher and communicate my research agenda to the people with whom I am interacting.

Interviews. I will recruit approximately 15 participants for one-on-one interviews, conducted over the course of my fieldwork and at opportune times for in-depth reflection in relation to key events. Participants will be recruited based on their relationship with the DTES NH and an effort will be made to interview a cross-section of current/former staff, volunteers and community members at the NH. The interview questions will relate to each individual’s involvement at the organization and their personal perspectives on the right to food and how this concept is operationalized at the DTES NH. I will ensure that some participants are involved or affiliated with the Right to Food ‘zine, the Right to Food Commons group and the Community Food Assessment advisory committee—the three groups with which I am currently volunteering. It will be made clear that participation is completely voluntary and informed consent will be obtained (Appendix A: Letter of informed consent). Interviews will be approximately one hour in length and will take place in the DTES NH or another public location if preferred by the interview participant. Participation will be voluntary and participants will be free to terminate the interview at any time. In acknowledgement of the value of their time and to support their ability to participate, participants will be offered transit fare, childcare and other incidentals, which will be provided whether or not they are able to complete the interview.

Reflexivity. Throughout my research, I will systematically engage in an exercise of reflexivity by keeping a personal journal in which I will weekly (daily at key periods of time) reflect critically on my position not only as a researcher but also as a young, middle-class, white female and outsider to the community. Maintaining an awareness of my identity and positionality in the context of the research setting will allow me to question how my own privilege could influence data collection and interpretation (Onwuegbuzie et al. 2010). To strengthen the credibility and dependability of my data, I will consult with participants throughout all stages of interviewing, interpretation, drawing conclusions and presenting the results of the research (Stage & Mattson 2003).

Returning research and interpreting data. I will meet with participants one additional time following their interview to have them review and amend the verbatim interview transcript. At this time, they will be invited to add to or make any changes to the script. Preliminary findings will be compiled and presented at a gathering at the DTES NH approximately two months following the completion of fieldwork, where participants and other community members will be invited to share their perspectives in an informal roundtable discussion. This will serve to potentially bring more voices into the discussion as well as validate initial interpretations of the data.

3. Participants

Interviews will be conducted with approximately 15 individuals who are involved with the DTES NH in the capacity of either current/former staff, volunteer or program participant. Eligibility will be open to those who have been involved with the organization for at least six months to ensure that they have some level of familiarity with the work of the NH. Using a purposeful sampling technique (Coyne 1997), I will recruit participants individually through established relationships at the research site. Individuals may be interviewed on more than one occasion, depending on whether new insights, activities, or turns of events warrant further discussion. The informal roundtable discussion will be open to all community members, who will be invited through posters displayed at the NH and an ad in the DTES NH monthly calendar.

4. Informed consent

In accordance with the *Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans* (2010), informed consent will be obtained from all research participants (Appendix A: Letter of informed consent), including those who participate in the informal roundtable discussion. All materials will be delivered to participants at least 24 hours in advance of the interview.

5. Deception

No form of deception will be used in this research.

6. Feedback/Debriefing

I will record all of the interviews digitally and transcribe them verbatim. Interview participants will be presented with the transcripts approximately one month following their interview to ensure accuracy or make any changes. A summary of the initial findings will be presented at the community gathering two months following the interviews where attendees will be invited to participate in an informal roundtable discussion guided by 3 key questions that relate to the research (Appendix C: Roundtable discussion themes). Data emerging from this discussion will be used to strengthen the research findings.

7. Benefits and Risks

Benefits. Potential benefits to research participants include the opportunity to share their experiences and insights related to food security and the right to food in the DTES, which when compiled with the responses of other interview participants will help to create a picture of the work that the DTES NH is doing in the community. This could help to support the organization in its aims of securing future funding or partners. Information included in the community report detailing the challenges as well as strengths of the DTES NH and its rights-based approach to community food insecurity could be of value to other organizations engaged in similar work, both in the local community and elsewhere. Further, with the consent of interview participants, the data I collect will be shared with members of the ‘Revitalizing Japantown?’ project (U of M REB# J2012-200) in the DTES with which I am affiliated through my research supervisor Dr. Jeff Masuda. This information could be mobilized to support the project’s aims of advancing human rights for DTES residents.

Risks. During the interviews, information may be shared that is considered to be sensitive by interview participants, such as personal experiences of food insecurity or information about the DTES NH or other neighbourhood service providers that might compromise their relationship with these organizations. In order to mitigate these risks, identifying information including names and positions within the organization will be changed and interview transcripts will be presented to participants for review prior to the dissemination of research findings. Interview participants are free to change or remove any information that they do not want included in research results and publications.

There is also the risk that my critical analysis of the work being done by the DTES NH may be interpreted as a negative assessment by those involved with the organization. Every effort will be made to demonstrate that the foundational principal of my critical work is to support the valuable efforts being made by the DTES NH and potentially highlight gaps in service or alternate strategies that may better serve the organization.

8. Anonymity

All interview participants will select a pseudonym to use throughout the research process so that their names will not appear in any transcripts or other research materials. All data and participant contact information will be held under the supervision of myself and my supervisor and stored in our password protected computers. Pseudonyms will be used when reporting the research results to ensure participant confidentiality.

Confidential materials and research data, including participant contact information and all paper and digital records of transcripts and other research data will be stored in the office of my research supervisor upon completion of my dissertation, and, in accordance with Anonymity and data storage protocols indicated by the REB for the related “Revitalizing Japantown?” research project in the DTES (U of M REB# J2012-200), destroyed seven years after the thesis is approved by the Research Advisory Committee.

9. Compensation

Some of the interview participants are anticipated to be low-income individuals from the neighbourhood, many of whom already assume several unpaid volunteer obligations at the DTES NH and elsewhere. Recognizing that they may not be able to participate in an interview without support, all participants will be offered bus fare, childcare or other incidentals. This will facilitate participation but is not anticipated to have a coercive influence.

Attendees at the community gathering will receive a meal provided by the researcher as a show of gratitude for their participation and feedback on the research process.

10. Dissemination

The final results of this research will be written into my thesis and used for presentations and publications. These findings will be shared at conferences such as the annual Canadian Association of Geographers conference and submitted to academic journals such as *The Journal of Progress in Human Geography*.

An executive summary of the results of this study will be distributed to interested parties and organizations, such as the DTES NH, the Vancouver Food Policy Council and the Canadian Association for Food Studies. Participants will receive a copy of the executive summary through their preferred method of communication (e-mail or mail). Results will also be shared through community media such as the DTES Right to Food zine.

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Letter of informed consent



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Date

Research Project Title: *Realizing the Right to the City through the Right to Food? An exploration of community food activism in Vancouver's Downtown Eastside*

Principal Investigator and contact information: Jenna Drabble

Research Supervisor and contact information: Dr. Jeffrey R. Masuda, CD, PhD | Assistant Professor, Department of Environment and Geography | University of Manitoba

This consent form, a copy of which will be left with you for your records and reference, is only part of the process of informed consent. It should give you the basic idea of what the research is about and what your participation will involve. If you would like more detail about something mentioned here, or information not included here, you should feel free to ask. Please take the time to read and/or listen carefully and to understand any accompanying information.

My name is Jenna Drabble and I am a graduate student in the department of Environment and Geography at the University of Manitoba. I have been volunteering with the Downtown Eastside Neighbourhood house since April 2013. I am interested in food security and social justice and have worked and conducted research in these fields for the last several years.

Research and Procedures. This letter of informed consent is for participants of my master's thesis research study. The purpose of my project is to explore how people at the Downtown Eastside Neighbourhood House (DTES NH) understand and use 'the right to food' concept as a tool to address food insecurity and justice in the DTES. Specifically, I want to know how this concept might be used to connect the issue of food to broader rights struggles in the neighbourhood. Participation will involve: (1) an interview of approximately one hour,

comprised of questions that relate to experiences and involvement with the DTES NH and the right to food; and (2) a debriefing session to review the transcript of your interview within one month of the interview date.

Recording devices and debriefing. I will use a digital audio recorder to record our conversation. I will transcribe our interview verbatim and present it for your review during our debriefing session, at which time you will be welcome to make any desired changes. This information will be stored securely and accessible to my research team.

Anonymity, confidentiality and data management. You will be given the option to select an alternate name that will be used throughout the research process to ensure that your identity will remain anonymous in the presentation of my research. All written and recorded materials will be password encoded and stored in a secure location. Confidential material, including any identifying information, will be stored in a secure location and destroyed two years after the completion of the research.

Voluntary participation and withdrawal. You are free to decline to participate in this study, to not answer any questions that you may not be comfortable with and to leave the interview at any time, without facing any negative consequences.

Benefits. This study will offer you the opportunity to share your experience and insights related to food security and the right to food in the DTES, which when compiled with the responses of other interview participants will help to create a picture of the work that the DTES NH is doing in the community. This could help to support the organization in its aims in terms of securing future funding or partners. As well, you will be invited to attend a community feast at the conclusion of the project where the results of this research will be presented and participants can engage in an informal roundtable discussion that could help to inform future organizational goals and priorities. With your consent, the data I collect will be shared with members of the ‘Revitalizing Japantown?’ project in the DTES with which I am affiliated through my research supervisor. This information could be mobilized to support the project’s aims of advancing human rights for DTES residents.

Potential Risks. During the interview, information may be shared that is considered to be sensitive by interview participants. To reduce any potential risks to participants, identifying information such as names and positions will be changed and interview transcripts will be presented to participants for review prior to the dissemination of research findings. Interview participants are free to change or remove any information that they do not want included in research results and publications.

Findings. Initial findings will be presented at a gathering open to the community at the Neighbourhood House. Attendees at the gathering will be invited to comment on and contribute to the findings. The final results of this research will be written into my thesis and used for presentations and publications. These findings will be shared at conferences such as the annual Canadian Association for Food Studies conference and submitted to academic journals such as *The Journal of Progress in Human Geography*.

Dissemination. An executive summary of the results of this study will be presented to interested parties and organizations, such as the DTES NH, the Vancouver Food Policy Council and the Canadian Association for Food Studies. You will receive a copy of the executive summary through your preferred method of communication (e-mail or mail). Results will also be shared through community media such as the DTES Right to Food zine.

Do you understand and agree to the terms described here?

Your signature on this form or verbal consent indicates that you have understood to your satisfaction the information regarding participation in the research project and agree to participate as a subject. In no way does this waive your legal rights nor release the researchers, sponsors, or involved institutions from their legal and professional responsibilities. You are free to withdraw from the study at any time, and /or refrain from answering any questions you prefer to omit, without prejudice or consequence. Your continued participation should be as informed as your initial consent, so you should feel free to ask for clarification or new information throughout your participation.

This research has been approved by the Joint-Faculty Research Ethics Board at the University of Manitoba. If you have any concerns or complaints about this project you may contact any of the above-named persons or the Human Ethics Coordinator (HEC) at 474-7122. A copy of this consent form has been given to you to keep for your records and reference.

Participant's Signature _____ Date _____

Researcher and/or Delegate's Signature _____ Date _____

Interview Guide

Interview Script:

Thank you for meeting with me today and for agreeing to participate in an interview for my thesis research. I am interested in how 'the right to food' is used in community food initiatives and activism in the DTES and will be asking you some questions about your experience and involvement with the right to food at the Downtown Eastside Neighbourhood House.

This interview will take about an hour to complete. I want to encourage you to be as open with me as you feel comfortable. You do not have to answer a question if you do not want to and you may leave this interview at any time. I will be recording the interview so that I do not miss anything that you have to say, but I will not use your name in anything I write.

I will first make sure that you understand and have signed the informed consent form. Do you have any questions or concerns that you would like to address before we begin the interview?

Background Information

1. What do you think is important for me to know about you as a person?
2. What is your role at the DTES NH?
 - a) Staff (position, full or part-time, permanent or contract)
 - b) Volunteer (name of program)
 - c) Program participant (name of program)

3. How long have you been involved with the DTES NH?

The Right to Food and the DTES NH

4. From your perspective, what is the role of the DTES NH in the community?
5. What does the 'right to food' mean to you?
6. What have you learned about the right to food through your involvement with the DTES NH?
7. What do you think achieving the right to food would look like in the DTES?
8. Can you describe the strengths of the neighbourhood that are supporting the achievement of the right to food in the DTES?
9. Can you describe some of the barriers to achieving the right to food in the DTES?



Research Ethics and Compliance

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Fax +204-269-7173

APPROVAL CERTIFICATE

September 16, 2013

TO: Jenna Drabble
Principal Investigator

FROM: Susan Frohlick, Chair
Joint-Faculty Research E

Re: Protocol #J2013:132
"Realizing the Right to the City through the Right to Food? An exploration
of community food activism in Vancouver's Downtown Eastside"

Please be advised that your above-referenced protocol has received human ethics approval by the **Joint-Faculty Research Ethics Board**, which is organized and operates according to the Tri-Council Policy Statement (2). **This approval is valid for one year only.**

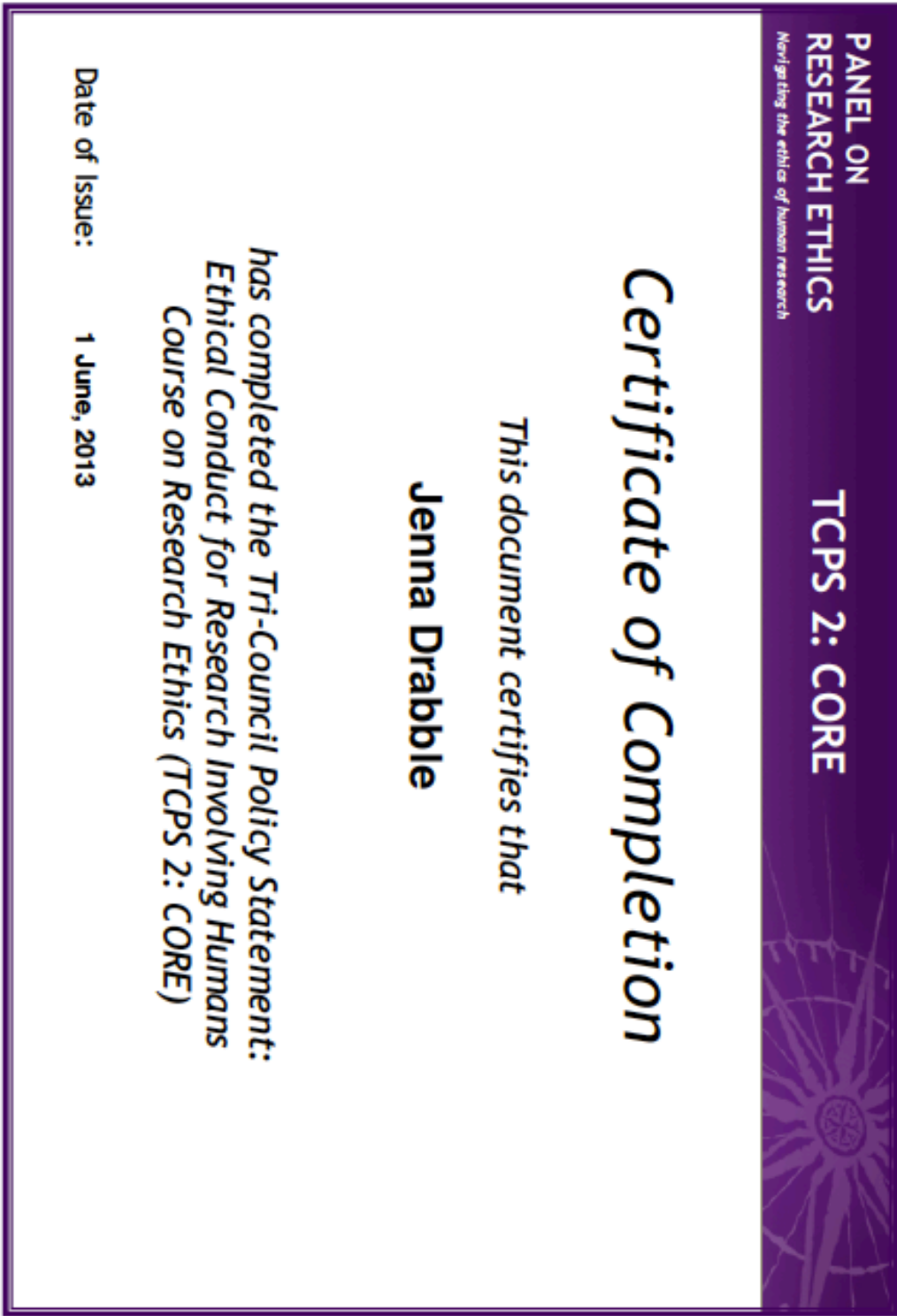
Any significant changes of the protocol and/or informed consent form should be reported to the Human Ethics Secretariat in advance of implementation of such changes.

Please note:

- If you have funds pending human ethics approval, please mail/e-mail/fax (261-0325) a copy of this Approval (identifying the related UM Project Number) to the Research Grants Officer in ORS in order to initiate fund setup. (How to find your UM Project Number: <http://umanitoba.ca/research/ors/mrt-faq.html#pr0>)
- if you have received multi-year funding for this research, responsibility lies with you to apply for and obtain Renewal Approval at the expiry of the initial one-year approval; otherwise the account will be locked.

The Research Quality Management Office may request to review research documentation from this project to demonstrate compliance with this approved protocol and the University of Manitoba *Ethics of Research Involving Humans*.

The Research Ethics Board requests a final report for your study (available at: http://umanitoba.ca/research/orec/ethics/human_ethics_REB_forms_guidelines.html) in order to be in compliance with Tri-Council Guidelines.



APPENDIX C: CONSENT FORM AMENDMENT



Department of
Environment and Geography
220 Sinnott Building
70A Dysart Road
Winnipeg, MB R3T 2N2

February 2014

Research Project Title: *Realizing the Right to the City through the Right to Food? An exploration of community food activism in Vancouver's Downtown Eastside*

Principal Investigator and contact information: Jenna Drabble

Research Supervisor and contact information: Dr. Jeffrey R. Masuda, CD, PhD | Assistant Professor, Department of Environment and Geography | University of Manitoba

This consent form, a copy of which will be left with you for your records and reference, is only part of the process of informed consent. It should give you the basic idea of what the research is about and what your participation will involve. If you would like more detail about something mentioned here, or information not included here, you should feel free to ask. Please take the time to read and/or listen carefully and to understand any accompanying information.

My name is Jenna Drabble and I am a graduate student in the department of Environment and Geography at the University of Manitoba. I have been volunteering with the Downtown Eastside Neighbourhood House since April 2013. I am interested in food security and social justice and have worked and conducted research in these fields for the last several years.

Research and Procedures. This letter of informed consent is for participants of my master's thesis research study. The purpose of my project is to explore how people at the Downtown Eastside Neighbourhood House (DTES NH) understand and use 'the right to food' concept as a tool to address food insecurity and justice in the DTES. Specifically, I want to know how this concept might be used to connect the issue of food to broader rights struggles in the neighbourhood.

The purpose of this meeting is to present research participants with my preliminary findings and receive feedback through a facilitated group discussion. Participation will involve a one-hour discussion based on the presentation materials.

Recording devices. I will use a digital audio recorder to record the discussion. Please indicate if you do not wish to be recorded and I will take notes instead. This information will be stored securely and accessible only to myself and my thesis supervisor.

Anonymity, confidentiality and data management. Anonymity cannot be provided as your attendance at this meeting indicates your role as an interview participant. To protect confidentiality, all identifying information will be removed in the presentation of the research and any data that is collected during the group discussion. All written and recorded materials will be password encoded and stored in a secure location. Confidential material, including any identifying information, will be stored in a secure location and destroyed two years after the completion of the research.

Voluntary participation and withdrawal. You are free to decline to participate in the discussion, to not answer any questions that you may not be comfortable with and to leave at any time, without facing any negative consequences.

Benefits. This study will offer you the opportunity to share your experience and insights related to food security and the right to food in the DTES, which when compiled with other research data will help to create a picture of the food access and availability in the community. This could help to strengthen the work of neighbourhood organizations such as the DTES NH and could inform future organizational goals and priorities.

Potential Risks. As indicated in the meeting invitation, your attendance at this event identifies yourself to other participants as a key informant in the research. Your confidentiality will be maintained as all identifying information has been removed from the data used in the presentation as well as future research publications.

Findings. The final results of this research will be written into my thesis and used for presentations and publications. These findings will be shared at conferences such as the annual Canadian Association for Food Studies conference and submitted to academic journals such as *The Journal of Progress in Human Geography*.

Dissemination. An executive summary of the results of this study will be presented to interested parties and organizations, such as the DTES NH, the Vancouver Food Policy Council and the Canadian Association for Food Studies. You will receive a copy of the executive summary through your preferred method of communication (e-mail or mail). Results will also be shared through community media such as the DTES Right to Food 'zine.

Do you understand and agree to the terms described here?

Your signature on this form or verbal consent indicates that you have understood to your satisfaction the information regarding participation in the research project and agree to

participate as a subject. In no way does this waive your legal rights nor release the researchers, sponsors, or involved institutions from their legal and professional responsibilities. You are free to withdraw from the study at any time, and /or refrain from answering any questions you prefer to omit, without prejudice or consequence. Your continued participation should be as informed as your initial consent, so you should feel free to ask for clarification or new information throughout your participation.

This research has been approved by the Joint-Faculty Research Ethics Board at the University of Manitoba. If you have any concerns or complaints about this project you may contact any of the above-named persons or the Human Ethics Coordinator (HEC) at 474-7122. A copy of this consent form has been given to you to keep for your records and reference.

☐

I consent to being recorded during the discussion (check box to indicate consent).

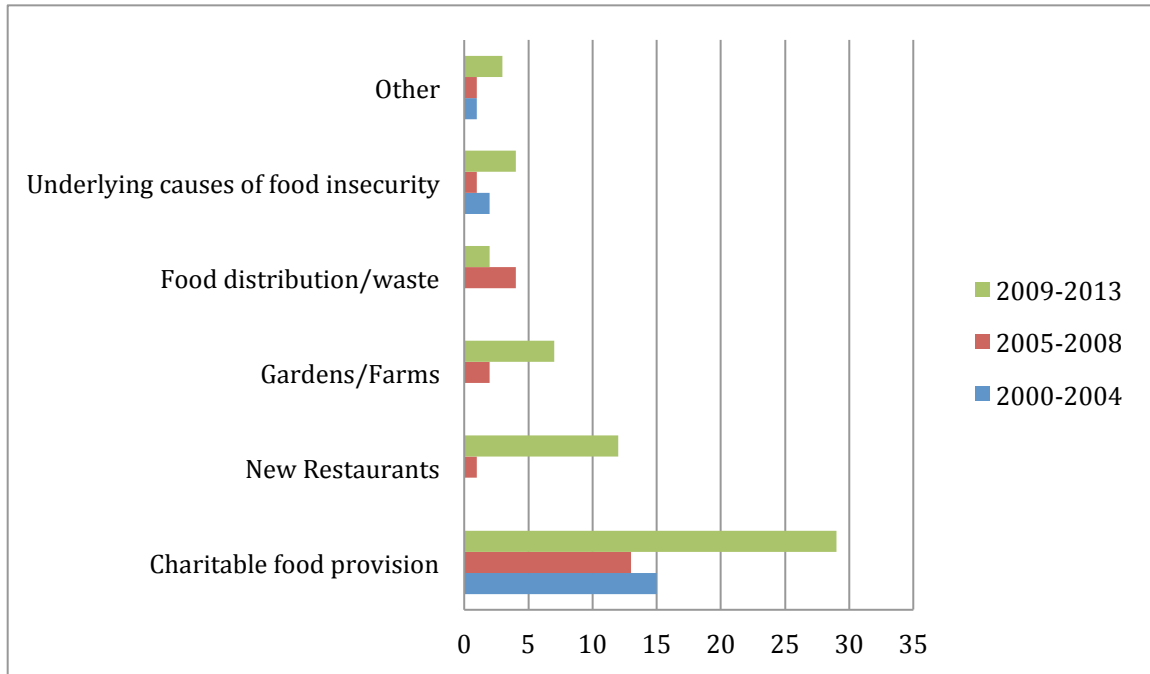
Participant's Signature _____

Date _____

Researcher's Signature _____

Date _____

APPENDIX D: TEXTUAL ANALYSIS THEMATIC OCCURENCES



APPENDIX E: PARTICIPANT PSEUDONYMS AND COMMUNITY AFFILIATIONS

Name	Community Affiliation
Julie	DTES NH staff & DTES resident
Allison	DTES NH staff
Bryan	DTES NH staff & former DTES resident
Genevieve	DTES NH staff
David	DTES NH volunteer & DTES resident
Jessica	DTES NH staff
Maria	DTES NH Board member
Tom	DTES NH volunteer
Colin	Former DTES NH staff
Ben	Former DTES NH staff
Emma	Former DTES NH staff
Andrew	Former DTES NH staff & former DTES resident
Ellen	Former DTES NH staff & former DTES resident
Linda	DTES resident & Kitchen Tables Project staff
Nicholas	Vancouver Food Policy Council member
Diane	Staff, DTES organization
Jane	Kitchen Tables Project staff
Kim Sue Mary John	Chinese language focus group (RJ)
Grace Alan	Chinese language focus group (RJ)
Ann James	English/Chinese language focus group (RJ)