Chapter 1
Food Poverty and Insecurity: The Poor in a World of Global Austerity

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Introduction

During times of austerity a constantly used phrase is 'tightening of the belt'. This *leitmotif* has been a constant refrain as part of the most recent examples of voluntary or enforced austerity measures introduced after the Global Financial Crisis from 2007 to the present. Countries involved have taken it upon themselves, or have been forced, to introduce measure to rein-in public expenditure, introduce austere economic measures and to… tighten belts. Yet few have had the opportunity to use this to address public health nutrition; the belt tightening has been done to address issues of financial austerity and economic stability often with huge implications for nutrition and health outcomes. Nutrition and diet-related outcomes have been a casualty of the economic crisis. Although belt tightening is a convenient and easy to use shorthand for strategies required during austere conditions, it could be argued that pulling belts a few notches tighter is, actually, a consequence rather than a strategy during hard economic terms. For many countries and regions belt tightening is a coping mechanism, a way of dealing with the hard times. In other words, as austerity measures take hold, the effects are to decrease the circumference or girth of individuals or the collective population (Egger and Swinburn 2010; Caballero and Popkin 2002). Of course, this is usually the result of limits placed on food intake, and the overall effects seen as the body starts to react to lower levels of energy and other nutrition substrates.

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Here in this volume, we have examples from India, Brazil, and SE Asia where steps have been taken to safeguard the health and nutritional status of the populace. It must be said that these initiatives are often taken and operate in the face of huge barriers and a lack of policy support.

Creating Pressure Points and Even Greater Inequalities

From OECD data (2011) we know countries such as Australia, the UK, and the USA have widened inequalities and increased levels of poverty, while others with increased levels of poverty have narrowed the inequality gap. So for some the belt has been tightened involuntarily and left them without much choice. The image of belt tightening is usually marketed as one where the more corpulent members of the population are in need of girth correction. However, an inevitable consequence of austerity is that it is the most vulnerable who end up having to tighten belts by virtue of going without the necessary food for health and wellbeing. The distinction here is often one of choice; while the well off adopt a lifestyle based on austerity they do so to improve their health or to save the planet; the poor on the other hand are driven by a lack of choice and the imposition of austere choices.

It is these ideas that provide a backdrop for this book. We are interested in exploring the ways in which austerity measure have been invoked in different countries, cultures, and contexts so that various population groups have had different access to the necessities of living, including basic food supplies. We deliberately sought contributions from a range of authors who could write about the ways that austerity can ‘bite’ and thus impact on belt tightening. But, any account of belt tightening under austerity measures requires an understanding of and the reactions to such measure in an historical setting, to look to modern approaches and solutions and why some countries have addressed the problem. Chapters in this book show a range of solutions to food poverty. These range from food intervention projects that consider food as a right, to approaches involving state or charity or individuals, or indeed all three. Several chapters in this volume also show the various levels at which governance occurs from the regional (as in global and SE Asia), through nation states (Australia, South Africa, and Brazil) to city (New York) and local initiatives (France).

Food Protest and the Underlying Moral Economy

Thompson (1993) in his review of the ‘moral economy’ of the English crowd in the eighteenth century noted that food riots were often a flash point for the anger of the populace. They were aimed at a more fundamental truth, which was the erosion of traditional liberties and privileges, and food offered a convenient focus for dissent

and social protest as opposed to merely a protest against food or hunger. The riots coincided with the demise of the medieval economy, its social order and the growth of the pre-industrial and early industrial economy. Riots were social calamities and engaged the energies of the 'mob', and the response of the civic authorities was muted. For some this was seen as collusion with the mob, for others it was a way of absorbing the energies and attention of the mob so that structurally nothing much changed. Seeking solutions in local projects could be said to ignore the structural influences of the global food system and 'Big Food' (George 2010; Moodie et al. 2013; Caraher 2003), it also medicalises and creates what Crawford (1977, 1980, 1984) calls a form of healthism in that it locates the solution at the individual or community level. Similarly to Crawford's arguments about self-help and alternative healthcare movements, food austerity as a lifestyle choice also runs the danger of depoliticising food and the food system. Food which is conceptualized as individual is highly dangerous; you can be responsible and change the world! For many, austerity has become a lifestyle issue and this is to be welcomed, but what needs to be acknowledged is that such choices require resources, resources that the poor do not always have. Such dangers are pointed out in the chapter on food banks where charity becomes the default option and we end up with '*successful failures*'. On the other hand, the New York City and Brazilian examples given in the book demonstrate how food poverty can be tackled by combining community activism with state support.

The chapter from France shows how agricultural and social policy can be linked to deliver and shape a new and politically aware food system. The danger as Belasco (2007) points out is that dissatisfaction with the food system often becomes diverted into individual action and people opting out of the dominant food system, leaving an already inadequate and dysfunctional system to those who are most disadvantaged. They do not have the resources or social capitals necessary to put into action such choices. Belasco (2007) noted that many of the original US alternative food networks were, by the 1970s, torn apart by disputes over the issue of meeting consumer choice and the extent to which these undermined the original values of 'oppositional' politics. We can see such approaches outlined in the chapters on France and Brazil while the chapter on food banks in developed nations shows regression to a position of philanthropy and communities helping themselves, devoid of a political stance and no support from government.

The economic dogma espoused by Adam Smith (The Wealth of Nations), in the eighteenth century, promoted that free-trade and a self-regulating economy would result in social progress. He advocated that government needed only to preserve law and order, justice, defend the nation, and provide for a few social needs that could not be met through the market. This philosophy of free trade was used for non-intervention in the Irish famine of 1845–47 and the great Bengal famine of 1943 (Sen 1981, 1997; O'Gráda 2015) and more recently in the Ethiopian famines of the 1970/80s. Yet food is one of the goods that as well as being necessary for physical development and the maintenance of health also fulfills a social need. This can be seen in the development of public health policy related to food in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (Hamlin 1998; Davis 2001) a point recently

reiterated by Sen (2015) in his criticism of modern economic austerity. Today, we see a re-emergence of that economic dogma in the global economy in the policies of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund and global regulatory bodies, such as the World Trade Organization, through the doctrine of neo-liberal economics (Hertz 2001; George 2010; Hossain et al. 2014; Colombo and Onorati 2013).

Thompson's (1993) analysis was that direct protest (in his case food riots), if not actually encouraged by those in power, were tolerated as ways of distracting attention from the real forces of change (i.e., changes in the political and economic order). Historically, Fernández-Armesto (2001, 2003) contends that food was the basis of the 'first class system.' Yet the focus of food historians has been on the gargantuan appetite and the development of surplus, which for many is seen as socially functional. The scraps from the tables of the rich were seen as feeding the poor—and grateful they should be! Yet food as an element of protest is a fact of life. This protest takes two forms which are not mutually exclusive but sit at opposite ends of a continuum of protest (Albritton 2009). The first is where there is a huge disparity in food intake between the rich and the poor, the second where food is a metaphor for other ills that are occurring in the world. The latter use of food as a metaphor and target for protest represents wider issues such as globalization. While some protestors may not understand the intricacies of global trade agreements, food stands as a useful metaphor for the ills that the agreements represent and their impact on poverty within countries.

An overlooked fact in the light of the recent and current global unrest, riots, and the fall of nation states has been the role of food and the tightening of the belt policies which led to food prices increases, food riots which then morphed into wider protest against repressive regimes. For example, in Sidi Bouzid, a small town 200 miles from Tunis Mohammed Bouazizi, 26, was a high school graduate, working as a vegetable merchant. On Dec. 17, 2010 his cart and its contents were seized by a policewoman after he failed to produce a permit. The policewoman apparently struck Bouazizi, insulted him and refused his offer to pay the fine. Bouazizi immolated himself, whether as a protest or out of despair is not clear. The country's January food shortage and the act of one man caused the pot to boil over. The town's citizens took to the streets in protest. The protests became the feedstuff of TV and social media, and before long several cities in the once quiet, stable nation were in the throes of a people's revolution. In London, the riots in 2011 started in an area of London known for its deprivation and food deserts (Caraher et al. 2013). In both instances food is not the focus of the protest but a symbol of what is wrong and representative of people's expectations to a healthy and affordable diet.

Protest around food can be channeled into actions which while useful and beneficial to those undertaking them may make little change to the overall food system (Guthman 2011). This form of distraction of the 'gaze' from structure to individual (Coveney 2006) or local action is sometimes called 'pilotitis', where, in the place of large-scale social change, another pilot project with a focus on behavior change is launched.

Many of the chapters in this volume point out that food itself can be a unifying issue; that can be both a public good, in that it can be seen as contributing to the health of a population, but also a private good in that it is subject to the law of supply and demand. It can also be regulated to create a middle ground between the public and private. The examples in the chapters on Brazil and France show how neo-liberal economic policies can be harnessed to address issue of food, public health, and the greater good. The entitlement to food occupies both the realms of citizenship where, as citizens, people and communities have a right to an adequate amount of safe wholesome food. At the same time food is a consumer good where the entitlement may be mediated by trade and financial rights (De Schutter 2011). These debates occur in the chapters on South Africa, Brazil, and India.

Globalization, Food and Health in the New World Order

In the present world order there are many similarities with the past. The process of globalization is not new but the scale and the direction and control of it are. Colonial powers in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries transported new foods around the globe through, for example, the so-called 'Columbian Exchange' between the new world of the Americas and the old world of Europe (Sokolov 1991). The British Empire in the nineteenth century was the epitome of a global economy (Davis 2001). What is different today is the scale and pace of globalization, and the shift of control and influence to the transnational corporations (TNCs) and some reframing of the debates around consumer as opposed to citizen rights (De Schutter 2011). The public good element of food has been challenged and replaced by a rhetoric of consumerism and what has been called '*consumptogenesis*' (Dixon et al. 2014; Banwell et al. 2012).

Sen (1981, 1997) sees the issues related to food as about the entitlements one has. Famine he argues is rarely the result of a lack of food but of a lack of entitlement. This is an important distinction as in the old global order the nation states had some commitment to their citizens and ensuring entitlement however this was manifested (e.g., food welfare schemes). The new order owes no such allegiance to its *customers*. Hence, we see the rise of solutions such as food banks (see chapter on big society and shunting yards) and the state demanding the evidence of the need before it takes action (see chapters 8 and 9 on food banks and the rise of food inequality in Australia).

Adopting Klein's (2007) principle of the shock doctrine we can see how "free market liberalism" and its policies have come to dominate the world through the exploitation of disaster-shocked people and countries. Food is a key here as it is often the means to persuade countries to open up their borders in order to be able to export but then leaves them open to invasion by foreign brands, e.g., belly flaps and turkey tails to Pacific islands, etc. The influence of corporate players and their encroachment into newly emerging economies can be seen as the new invaders, it is not the military complex that defines the new invasion but often food corporations.

This is helped by the fact is that citizens now more readily identify with corporations in their everyday lives. They believe corporations and brands to be important, therefore, *ipso facto*, they are important.

All this raises issues for those involved in developing responses to the globalization of food. Alliances are often based on flimsy relationships and the competing ideologies of members. For some the issues are antiglobalization and the dismantling of the system, for others it is the reform of the system to make it fairer. The inaudibility of a coherent approach can be seen in Klein's (2002) book of essays which include a range of approaches and philosophies. Nonetheless, the way forward is to develop alliances, which can tackle the underlying issues of the global food system and bring about permanent change. For 30 years the belief has been that free-trade and a self-regulating economy would result in social progress. There was a simple equation, free-trade, and economic liberalization = social liberalization. This mantra is in danger of being repeated as any protest against the global food system seems like an attack on social liberalization. Social liberalization has many benefits including the provision of education and the emancipation of women. Hertz (2001) points out that an anti-global stance does not necessarily have to be an anti-capitalist stance and is certainly not anti-internationalist. In addition social liberalization does not equate directly with economic liberalization and there is a need for food protestors to recapture the high ground. Global capitalism and the global food supply chain run the danger of killing democracy. The current focus of protestors on brands such as McDonalds or Coca-Cola also has imbued within them an anti-American perspective. This is a gross simplification of a complicated picture where large transnational companies unknown in the public eye continue to trade freely and unhindered.

Campaigns to change the global food system need to harness the desire for direct action of certain groups but this need to be constructive and hit companies where it matters, i.e., their profits. This links with what Barber (1995) called the tensions between McWorld (globalization) and local ground-up solutions (Jihad).

We have used the term food poverty deliberately as we feel it captures the reality of food scarcity for many people. While there is not one global definition of the term 'food poverty' the evidence from the chapters in this book suggest food poverty can be seen from three perspectives: (1) the causes and constraints facing both individuals, households, communities, and policy makers, (2) constrained choices or the 'lived experience,' and (3) the health impacts or outcomes. As a working definition of food poverty, this approach suggests that: where constraints are such that it is not possible for individuals or households to consume a nutritionally adequate diet, they could be considered to be in food poverty. We also hold to the term as it has long been used in food poverty work in the UK among pioneers such as Booth in London (1889) by Rowntree (2000) in York and in London by Maud Pember Reeves (2008) in her classic work '*Round About a Pound Week*' and right up to the present by Dowler (2003). Food poverty as a descriptor is often said to be emotive. But as the chapters in this book show we *should* be emotive (angry) over the state of hunger and food poverty in our communities and societies.

A final word on style, we have exercised a light hand in terms of editing, interjecting occasionally to ensure consistency between chapters but on the whole have let the authors' voices remain untouched. We feel this is proper and appropriate and while it may occasionally give rise to some inconsistency of expression across chapters, we decided to let this stand and to trust the reader to interpret within their own frameworks.

In terms of structure, the book is laid out as follows. The first chapter by ***Stringer*** provides a global overview of the food system and availability, this is followed by chapter on SE Asia by ***Tahil*** and the challenges faced by the region as it develops and the challenges posed by neo-liberal economics for food security. These are followed by a chapter on the right to food in India (***Lindgren***) which details how government has been held responsible for ensuring food security. We then move to a chapter on South Africa (***Muzigaba and colleagues***) and the nutrition challenges when faced with a complex series of epidemiological and healthcare challenges all located within a nutrition transition. We move then to more specific examples with a case study from new New York City (***Libman***) to address insecurity and health disparities, which shows what a city state can do with proper public health leadership to address public health nutrition. This is followed by some examples of work from France (***Carimentrand and colleagues***) which demonstrates what is possible and how agricultural and social policy can be linked and harnessed to address food poverty. This is followed by an input on food banks in developed economies (***Ronson and Caraher***) which questions the rise and apparent success of such endeavours, it also shows how such initiatives can depoliticize food politics. The situation in Australia is set out by ***Pollard and colleagues*** in what has been called the 'lucky country' but clearly from their data not for all. The need for data to inform policy is a large part of their contribution. The final contribution is a chapter on Brazil, by ***Rocha***, which shows what can be done and how in an emerging BRIC economy the power of neo-liberal economy policies has been harnessed to address food inequality and poverty. We, as editors provide a final commentary which takes the form of a conversation and reflection on the contributions.

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