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Tiina Silvasti (eds) (2020), *The
Rise of Food Charity in Europe*,
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Question; what is significant about the rise of food charity across various European countries? Explored with insignificant detail, this edited volume sufficiently answers this question by drawing on four key areas associated with the rise of food poverty and food charity. Cutting across both social policy and European geography this book examines the development of food charity and its association with the welfare state; the impact of changing social policies - writ large neoliberalism; social justice; and, future possibilities, this edited volume provides an extensive outline of how food poverty has been understood across several European countries. The analysis is focused on responsibilities and considers very well – key socio-political questions such as; where does responsibility lie within the rising food poverty crisis currently engulfing neoliberal states? Is this the responsibility of families, government, the charitable sector, or a combination of all these actors?

In doing so, the book offers a structured approach, combining like for like features within each case study chapter of European countries. Moreover, it is in framing the debate which this volume does very well, such as its early insistence on providing an outline of the terminology across the sector. The book questions the language of ‘hunger’, such as; ‘food poverty’, ‘food charity’ and, finally ‘food aid’, all of which seem to be expressions that travel well. However, terminology such as ‘food insecurity’, as discussed by several contributors, does not seem to travel well as it becomes obscured by reflections of food safety.

Similarities in structure and policy

This book provides a fascinating insight to how governments, charities and the private sector are handling (or simply ignoring, as is often the case) the experience of growing hunger across developed European countries, and who is ultimately responsible. The rise of neoliberal attitudes is noted by most authors as being a key ideology associated with rising inequality, dismantling levels of state help and, thus ultimately encouraging food poverty and hunger.

Specifically, it is interesting to note that even in more Socially Democratic countries, such as Finland and The Netherlands, there is a continued rising tide of welfare conditionality driven hunger. However, what is equally sad to note is that as the book progresses the same story, albeit from different European nations, seems to be the same. Each chapter recognises the similarities inherent within the rise of food charity across separate EU countries - that is the increasing reliance on food charity as a way for national governments to avoid their social contract and social responsibilities.

This begs the question; what hope is there for neoliberal nations such as the UK, who may well be considered to be at a relatively early stage of their food charity journey? As Lambie-Mumford and Loopstra note within their chapter charitable food aid held little sociological imagination within the UK until 2012. Yet with the election of the Conservative-led Coalition Government in 2010, and the ideological pursuit of austerity politics, the UK saw the birth of the Welfare Reform Act 2012, understood to be one of the most significant changes to UK welfare since Beveridge. As this significant policy direction commenced, a reshaping of the social contract also became activated, fostering heightened conditionality and intensified sanctions, combined with a precarious workforce resulting in the visible expression of hunger. The newly envisioned 'Big Society' was meant to embolden the virtues of community spirit during this time of need and fill the welfare gap left by a retreating government. Food banks and other food charity organisations are emblematic of this Big Society.

Reflective across all chapters within this book, the same neoliberal spirit of the UK Coalition Government is discernible within a pan-European expression of hunger that is continually greeted with actors within the third sector; a manifestation of this 'Big Society'.

Framing; combined policies of food recovery and food poverty

As noted by Silvasti and Tikka in their chapter about the continued rise of hunger in Finland, the framing of food poverty associated policies become ‘flipped on their heads’ as a policy of environmental challenge. Behavioural ‘nudges’ towards environmental concerns serve to highlight a drive towards a sociological apathy about diverting food waste towards hungry people. This, combined with similar policies from other European countries about food waste recovery, as a form of aid, hints at a clear thrust towards the institutionalisation of food aid across Europe.

As above, the story of this book is much the same across European nations. Neoliberal policies, combined with austerity measures, have had a detrimental effect on the poorest across Europe with food banks becoming the resultant saviour. This neoliberal ideology of less state help and more ‘stand on your own two feet’ is recognised across this book. What is clear is that we still must continue to challenge this issue both from an academic and a rights-based perspective as is made clear towards the end of the book. What is also clear is that short-termism in policy will not achieve this, individuals and groups need to call upon governments to fix this issue immediately or suffer a similar fate of other nations - where hunger has become politically ignored and food banks socially institutionalised.