



Original Research Article

Transformation or the next meal? Global-local tensions in food justice work

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Abstract

This article presents conversations across difference that took place among community partners and researchers at a week-long workshop in T'Sou-ke First Nation territory in 2019. The workshop launched the Four Stories About Food Sovereignty research network and project, which brings together food producers, activists, and researchers representing T'Sou-ke Nation in British Columbia, Wayuu Indigenous communities in Colombia, refugee communities in Jordan, and small-scale farmers in South Africa. We focus here on conversations that highlight global-local tensions in food justice work, the pressures of extractive economy, and pressures arising from climate crisis—challenges framed by some participants at the level of global extractivism and colonial-capitalism, and by others at the level of the soil. As these conversations reveal, there was more common ground than conflict in shared histories of dispossession, shared predicaments of extractive capital and its government allies, and shared concern to renew and reinvigorate ancestral practices of care for territory.

Keywords: Food sovereignty; Indigenous food systems; decolonization; local food systems; capitalism; climate change; social movements

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“As we sit here the Amazon burns.” Jakeline Romero Epiayu

“Our soil is completely dead.” Josephine Mathebula

Introduction

These distinct framings of the challenges facing food producers and vulnerable communities globally signal the varying approaches to food-system change pursued by different constituencies. Jakeline Romero Epiayu, a community leader from the Wayuu First Peoples in northeastern Colombia, opened a public panel discussion in Victoria, British Columbia in September 2019 with this stark account of the environmental catastrophe unfolding in her country and on her continent. South African farmer Josephine Mathebula offered a similarly bleak description of the ecological disaster confronting the community farm where she has worked for much of her adult life. Both accounts speak to pressing challenges, although in different registers. Mathebula’s narrative is literally grounded in the substrate of everyday life, while Romero’s gestures to global implications of the climate crisis. Our title, “Transformation or the Next Meal?”, speaks to such scalar disjuncture as well. When considering possible approaches to the challenges facing food systems—challenges confronting those communities and individuals most vulnerable to shocks within the system daily—at what level is action most likely to be effective? In the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, with all the vulnerabilities and food system fragilities it has laid bare, many analysts call for transformative change at global and local levels, dismantling corporate domination of global supply chains in favour of regionalized, democratized food systems based in environmentally and socially sustainable practices (Altieri & Nicholls, 2020; Clapp & Moseley, 2020; Holt-Giménez & Shattuck, 2011; Van Der Ploeg, 2020). From where does such transformation emanate? What political resources are to be grasped by those seeking to intervene in dysfunctional global and local food systems? Does the imperative lie in a transformative political imagination aimed at systemic change, or a more grounded orientation seeking to craft liveable alternatives in the here and now? As suggested in the conversations below, for food justice initiatives to be broadly effective—at the level of political mobilization and policy intervention, *and* at the level of daily life—multiple scales must be engaged at once. We subscribe to the concept of “Survival Pending Revolution,” coined by the Black Panther Party in the early 1970s and recalled by Jan Poppendieck (2022, this issue): “survival programs” in the here and now ensure not only survival, but, at their best, can help to seed new spaces of possibility, liberated spaces where people can begin to “reimagine, reorganize institutions (welfare, employment, economy)” (Narayan, 2020, p. 198), and work toward self-determination (Gibson-Graham & Cameron, 2007). Syma Habib (2022, this issue) also evokes such a space.

The conversations shared here took place at a transnational workshop on community-level initiatives toward food justice hosted on the lands and waters of T’Sou-ke First Nation on

Vancouver Island in 2019. The week-long workshop inaugurated a community-engaged research network and project called “Four Stories About Food Sovereignty,” which brings together small-scale food producers and food-system activists from four continents to examine historical food crises and explore strategies to develop socially and ecologically sustainable food systems. The Four Stories project works across difference, bringing together partners from distinct social locations within food movements—from farmers to human rights activists to academic researchers. The workshop brought into conversation for the first time four distinct food justice projects: the struggle of the T’Sou-ke people to restore Indigenous food pathways under the power of private property rights exercised by forestry companies over their lands; the struggle of Palestinians in exile to preserve their distinctive food relations and culture in ways that contest colonial appropriation of their lands; the struggle of the Wayuu people of Colombia to achieve greater autonomy over food production, even as their lands are degraded by the activities of multinational mining capital; and the struggle of peasant farmers in South Africa to renew and reinvigorate sustainable knowledge and practice in a “post-apartheid” context, where the government favours commercial agriculture and white farmers still own most arable land. The fault lines at the workshop were many, ranging across language, race, gender, religion, region, and life experience. In this paper, we re-present conversations that shed light on the global-local nexus, and global-local tensions, in food work.¹

Theory and methodology

Our research is informed by Dene political scientist Glen Coulthard’s (2014) concept of grounded normativity, which he characterizes as the “place-based foundation of Indigenous decolonial thought and practice” (p. 13). Grounded normativity encompasses all the Indigenous “land-connected practices and longstanding experiential knowledge that inform and structure [Indigenous] ethical engagements with the world and our relationships with human and nonhuman others over time” (Coulthard, 2014, p. 13).² Since land dispossession is at the core of Indigenous experience of settler colonial capitalism, such “place-based resistance and criticism” (Coulthard, 2014, p. 14, 2017) is fundamental to any shift toward just futures. Secwepemc educator-activist Dawn Morrison (2020) similarly emphasizes the political salience of local, place-based action: despite the intergenerational traumas and genocidal tactics imposed throughout colonization, “we are persisting into the 21st century...Indigenous peoples persist in

¹ Workshop participants came together in a deep tradition of South-South cooperation, as exemplified by such currents as transnational peasant movements (Nyéléni, 2007), Indigenous activism across nations (Coulthard, 2017; Simpson, 2017), Palestinian-Black engagements in struggles for freedom (Nassar, 2019), and broader post-war anti-colonial alliances (Getachew, 2019).

² “Indigenous” is used broadly here to encompass peoples displaced and dispossessed by settler colonialism, including (for our purposes) in the Indigenous Americas, South Africa, and Palestine.

our efforts of regaining control in decision making on matters that impact our sacred trusts of land, culture, spirituality, and future generations” (p. 18). Nishnaabeg scholar Leanne Betasamosake Simpson (2017) locates the roots of Indigenous cultural-political resurgence within local knowledge traditions and grounded, everyday actions that uphold that knowledge and refuse settler colonial logics. Simpson (2017) points to cultural stories, like that of muskrat retrieving the soil for the resurgent earth, as essential teachings and evidence that “we will be there anyway,” despite dispossession and other forms of colonial violence: Indigenous peoples across the Americas were “born into a centuries-old legacy of resistance, persistence, and profound love” (pp. 5-6) that connects Indigenous struggles around the world. Cherokee scholar Jeff Corntassel and Songhees ecosystem specialist Cheryl Bryce (2012) describe the struggle as a multi-scalar one to “reclaim and regenerate one’s relational, place-based existence by challenging the ongoing, destructive forces of colonization” (p. 152; Settee and Shukla, 2020).

In all these formulations, local, grounded knowledge and practice are the route (and root) to structural transformation. Morrison’s (2020) and Simpson’s (2017, 2011) emphasis on persistence, and the conjuring of resurgence in place and in the everyday, resonates poetically with the Palestinian concept of *sumud*. *Sumud* signifies steadfastness or persistence in the face of forms of oppression that threaten to destroy Indigenous worlds (Hazou, 2013; Johannson & Vinthagen, 2020; Richter-Devroe, 2018; Marie et al., 2018; Sa’di & Abu-Lughod, 2007; Sharqawi, 2021; Busse, 2022). It is about more than surviving the end of one’s world; it is a means for outlasting colonial capitalist systems so that Indigenous worlds can be restored in a decolonial, earth-sustaining future. In this way, seemingly humble practices of everyday life take on a distinct political valence. As a practice of both preservation and restoration—the steadfast ground of worldmaking—*sumud* inhabits what Potawatomi scholar Kyle Powys Whyte (2018), drawing on the Anishnaabe frame of intergenerational time, conceives of as “spiralling time” (p. 228). In contrast to a linear ecological time that divides a stable and prosperous present from a dystopian future of climate catastrophe, Whyte (2018) foregrounds a distinctive and heterogeneous temporality—spiralling time—that locates an existing dystopia in the deeper ancestral time of people who have “already lived through” myriad losses resulting from colonialism. Viewed from within this conception of intergenerational, spiralling time, Indigenous “conservation and restoration are motivated by how we put dystopia in perspective as just a brief, yet highly disruptive, historical moment for us—at least so far” (Whyte, 2017, p. 208; Williams & Henare, 2009). *Sumud* can be similarly seen as a practice of refusal (A. Simpson, 2014) of the end of the world in an ongoing dystopian time, and as a worldmaking renewal of a deeper ancestral time.³

Participants in our research network are rooted in diverse colonial geographies. To a degree, the composition of the group is an artifact of the expertise and trajectories of the researchers, rather than of deliberate decisions about regional representation. The depth and

³ Feminist scholars have made vital contributions to conceptualizations of grounded political action and the transformative potential of local action, in a long tradition (e.g., Fraser 2005, 2009; Snyder et al., 2015).

longevity of the research team's respective community engagements aligned fortuitously as we devised this transnational project. Vibert, director of our SSHRC-funded project,⁴ has been carrying out oral history research with South African farmers for a decade, and in 2018 began a research collaboration with Jordanian agricultural researcher Imad Alquran (who has been an agricultural researcher in Jordan for a decade and is represented in the conversations below). Puerta Silva has been doing community-engaged research with Wayuu communities in Colombia for twenty years. Murphy and Pérez Piñán have been engaged in research with Indigenous communities on Canada's west coast for several years. Gill has long-term research interests in Palestine and in food sovereignty more broadly.

The Four Stories workshop was rooted in our commitment to research as a vehicle for freedom and change (Cahill, 2010; Hackett, 2020; Levkoe et al., 2020). We take a community-engaged participatory action research (PAR) approach that emphasizes co-determination of purpose, co-creation of knowledge, and social learning (Kindon et al., 2010; Susman & Evered, 1978). Aiming for "thick" participation (Walker & Mathebula, 2020), community partners are involved in all phases of the research, from identifying research questions and challenges to data collection, designing community interventions and actions, and participating in knowledge dissemination and mobilization. Our commitments to feminist and Indigenous research approaches and perspectives are evidenced by our attention to the intersections of political location, gender, and generation in the research process (Pérez Piñán & Vibert, 2019). And yet, equality of participation remains an ideal rather than a reality (Phillips et al., 2013): for reasons ranging from technology access to institutional expectations, participants quoted in the conversations are (mostly) community partners, while the authors of the article are academics.

Community partner organizations chose their representatives for the workshop, with funding constraints limiting them to two members each. They followed processes of their own design, ranging from selection of organization leaders (Colombia) to decisions based in part on health status (South Africa). We aimed for diverse representation within the constraints of our networks at the time of workshop design. These constraints are reflected in the fact that most of the food producers present at the workshop were farmers, many participants were rurally based, and a majority of those at the workshop, and in the larger research network, are women. The longer-term research network includes fishers and pastoralists, urban food producers and traders, and youth participants, but those perspectives were under-represented at the workshop.

Language interpretation was a constant feature of our interactions, with Arabic, English, Spanish, Wayuunaiki, and Xitsonga being spoken at the same time. With an interpreter for every two participants, the process was remarkably seamless. The passages presented below are extracted from the written transcripts of our conversations across the week, confirmed through video footage where necessary. Editorial decisions shape the conversations presented here, in the way that editing inevitably shapes the narratives crafted from primary sources. Sometimes speakers were engaging in direct conversation, as represented below; other passages were

⁴ University of Victoria Ethics Protocol 19-0178-02.

selected from topics that arose repeatedly and were stitched together under the themes of this issue. With over sixty hours of conversation transcribed, a good deal of selection and editing was required. Thematic emphasis results in certain voices—particularly those of T’Sou-ke and Wayuu participants—being privileged over others in this article. In the interest of space, we have excised longer conversations on gendered and generational challenges.⁵ The precise words of those who spoke in languages other than English are mediated by interpretation and transcription. Workshop participants cited in the article are identified in Table 1, using their full names, by their request and in accordance with common practice in oral history research.

Table 1: Workshop participants

Name	Location	Affiliation/Role
Astrid Pérez Piñán	Canada	Faculty, Public Administration, University of Victoria
Aysheh Yousif Matar Azzam	Jordan	Founder and operator of community grain mill in Baqa’a Palestinian refugee camp
Basani Ngobeni	South Africa	Community worker, sustainable food advocate, communications student, language interpreter
Bikrum Singh Gill	United States	Faculty, Political Science, Virginia Tech
Christine George	Canada	T’Sou-ke Nation Indigenous plants specialist, traditional foods educator
Claudia Puerta Silva	Colombia	Faculty, Anthropology, University of Antioquia
Elizabeth Vibert	Canada	Faculty, History, University of Victoria
Fatima Obeidat	Jordan	Founder, Kananah Organization, teaches agroecological farming to urban and Syrian refugee women
Gordon Planes	Canada	Elected chief of T’Sou-ke Nation, spearhead of sustainable energy and food strategies

⁵ A fuller text of these conversations will be shared at <https://www.fourstoriesaboutfood.org/>

Imad Alquran	Jordan	Researcher, National Agricultural Research Council and UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO)
Jakeline Romero Epiayu	Colombia	Human rights and democratic food advocate, leader of Fuerza de Mujeres Wayuu
Josephine Mathebula	South Africa	Founding and executive member and farmer, Hleketani Community Garden
Matt Murphy	Canada	Faculty, Business, University of Victoria
Miguel Ramirez Boscan	Colombia	Human rights leader, member of Fuerza de Mujeres Wayuu
Mphephu Mtsenga	South Africa	Founding and executive member and farmer, Hleketani Community Garden

Conversations about food systems

The settings of the workshop, a forest camp in T’Sou-ke territory and a small former church used by the T’Sou-ke community as a meeting space, guided our opening conversations to topics local and Indigenous. Participants from Colombia, Jordan, and South Africa were keen to know about local foodways and to talk about their own food practices. We present here some of the most suggestive interactions from across the week, beginning with a conversation on day one when participants began to reflect on local-global tensions in approaches to food systems. The second section deepens those reflections through conversations about the extractivist economic system, including industrial agriculture. The third section turns to the consequences of the climate crisis. Conversations are presented in script form interspersed with editorial reflections and elaborations.

Local and global: Juxtapositions and synergies

BIKRUM [researcher]: Why should it matter, or does it matter, how our food is produced?

FATIMA [farmer and farming educator, Jordan]: We follow the mantra that it is better to eat the food around you than to eat food from outside.

Because what grows around you is always the most beneficial for your body's needs.

BIKRUM: [Tells the story of his grandfather in Punjab. Under British colonial rule, Punjab was used to grow wheat for export to Britain: many in Punjab were hungry while most in Britain were well fed.] My grandfather grew to hate the British, grew to hate the international system, and went to prison for protesting against this exportation of Punjabi food. When Punjab and India gained independence in 1948, there was energy around the potential to grow food for themselves, and discussions about how to grow food to be successful.

Bikrum went on to outline post-war agricultural policy, with its emphasis on Green Revolution technologies, “efficiencies” of industrial production, and incentives for many Global South economies to specialize in cash crops for export.

BIKRUM: Farmers like my grandfather started using American technologies, “better” seeds and “better” sprays to increase production, started growing lots of food, and became very successful. For about ten years. And then the soils started deteriorating, requiring more industrial inputs, and driving farmers into debt. There was only one type of wheat that lasted, the American wheat. All those indigenous wheats disappeared.

FATIMA: Every land has its own seed.

Differences soon emerged between those valorizing the local and those who raised questions about the utility—or even possibility—of a focus on native foods, local resources, and traditional technologies. On day two, the conversation became more critical.

MIGUEL [Wayuu community leader, Colombia]: We the Wayuu are now in the process of looking at *all* the possibilities that are being presented, in order to determine our way forward as Wayuu.... The real challenge for us is how we are going to recuperate [our ways] in a territory that is being sold off to multinational corporations.

JAKELINE [Wayuu community leader]: One thing we have to make clear is that the ideal of returning to everything traditional would be impossible. We eat lots of foods from outside. Of course there will have to be adaptations to the new ways and new technologies.

MIGUEL: One of the things that I think would be a good proposal is to transform the ways we work the land, to bring in more technologies to encourage the youth to want to work the land.... If we are going to continue to exist as a people, we have to be flexible in developing new ways of working the land, and bringing in the youth.

JAKELINE: Our organization [*Fuerza de Mujeres Wayuu*, Strength of Women] arises from the extraction activities that are causing problems in our regions. We are composed of groups of many Wayuu women. Mostly, our mission is political engagement education to get people active.

Miguel and Jakeline, community leaders and human rights activists who, in their thirties, are among the youngest community representatives in the research network, highlight what emerged as a recurring tension at the workshop: globally and politically focused approaches versus local initiatives that might appear to be less political. Miguel and Jakeline are deeply involved in the political mobilization of Wayuu women, youth, and the wider population in resistance to international mining activities that have dispossessed them of land and water resources and threaten human and ecological health. The immediacy of the crisis in Wayuu communities—including the deaths of as many as 5000 children from malnutrition-related illnesses in the past decade—shaped their perspectives and approaches. Jakeline and Miguel were at first frustrated with what seemed to them incrementalist and “traditional” suggestions put forth by other participants, as their remarks above indicate. At the same time, as we see below, they valued place-based interventions and came to appreciate their political content. Miguel’s call for technology might suggest he is proposing industrial agricultural methods; in fact, the technology Miguel has helped introduce among Wayuu youth includes cellphone use for data collection and sharing, storytelling, and video production—a political rather than an industrial technology. T’Sou-ke Chief Gordon Planes insisted throughout the week on the central and potentially transformative role of deeply rooted local knowledge in re-teaching people to live in ecologically and socially sustainable ways. Jakeline was sympathetic “[i]n an ideal world,” as she says below, but pointed to challenges:

CHIEF PLANES: If people understood the territories they lived in, the lands and waters, and the food resources that live within their territories, they would be able to utilize and protect those resources in a sustainable way.... Those lessons handed down from our elders are priceless, they teach us how to live in a sustainable way. We need to really think about the old way, and combining it with the new way.

JAKELINE: In an ideal world, we dream of being able to cultivate foods that our ancestors cultivated. But in the real world, we are facing so many social, political, economic crises.

As further conversations reveal, local and global, place-based and outward-facing approaches can interact and intersect on a spectrum rather than as binary oppositions.

Challenging the extractive economy and industrial agriculture

Meta-analyses of the pressures of the global extractive economy offered by the Colombians and Chief Planes repeatedly brought into sharp relief the global structures shaping local challenges. As Miguel and Chief Planes emphasize here, it is the extractivist economic model, with its short-term imperatives and lack of long-term vision, that pillages Indigenous lands and undermines food systems.

MIGUEL: Our discussions [among the Colombians at the workshop] focus on the politics that end up having an effect on our food sovereignty. There's a global dynamic that forces the Colombian government to participate in an extractive process in our country. That is the major problem.... This extractivism, this whole system, stimulates a lot of corruption in the whole territory. This global extractive process is combined with the fact that our region has little water, and there are mines that are using up the little water that we have. Just one of the companies alone has caused the disappearance of seventeen sources of water in our territory, ranging from rivers to streams. These have disappeared. Even the ones that are left, we are running the risk of losing those. They are already contaminated.... [The Cerrejón mine] is actually the largest open air [coal] mine in the Americas. And this mine is right where a lot of sources of water are, and the company continues to expand. There continue to be more [government] subsidies for these extractive companies, and we are being displaced. Because the communities have needs, they end up having to make agreements with the companies, and they end up ceding parts of their territories.

CHIEF PLANES: If you live in Fort McMurray [in the Canadian tar sands], your livelihood is destroying the environment. It's just right in front of your face. But the way the companies combat that is they pay you money, more money [to work there].

AYSHEH [Palestinian miller and food producer, Jordan]: What is the role of the government? Is it too weak to stop these companies?

MIGUEL: All of the governments in Colombia have seen this extractivist model as the way for the country to move forward.... And we want people to remember that the Wayuu are on the border of Venezuela and Colombia.... On the Venezuelan side it is a Chinese company exploiting the coal, and Venezuela is working under a socialist regime. There are Wayuu territories on both sides of the border.... It might look like it's the global capitalist economy that is causing this, but...this is all caused by the *extractive* economic model.⁶

⁶ Alberto Acosta (2013) identifies extractivism as a mode of accumulation that started under European colonialism. He defines extractivism as: "those activities which remove large quantities of natural resources that are not

JAKELINE: And that translates into institutional weakness—because of the pressure of the companies on the governments to make their laws amenable to continued exploitation.

CHIEF PLANES: One of the problems we face in our territory is private land ownership. Like timber companies that haven't adapted to change and specifically [haven't changed] their harvest rates. They're harvesting way too early, and it has an effect on our food systems.... If you were to look at our territory and the terrestrial environment as a food forest, that's where we need to rebirth—not seeing it as a tree farm license for extraction, but as a food forest. And then everyone shares it, and if everyone shares it then everyone takes care of it.

Chief Planes emphasized local interventions as the path to “rebirth” a just economy. Miguel spoke in a somewhat different register, explaining that Wayuu actions are now driven by their structural critique. That critique, and their model of political mobilization, have fallen into place gradually as they have been forced to confront multinational mining companies in Wayuu lands and waters.

MIGUEL: We're obviously as communities at a disadvantage when faced with global companies. So what we can do is to organize ourselves and to train ourselves and to learn and build resilience and resistance within our community.... This has allowed us to understand [challenges] on a global level. We've been able to sit face-to-face with these companies to discuss the problems they are causing. These are processes that didn't exist fifteen years ago. Over this period, together with other organizations, we have been able to push back and get companies to concede a little bit.... So far, the gains have not been enough. But we see all that there is, and the maturity of this resistance organization, and that we can have more successes in the future.

CHIEF PLANES: We need to work with governments and industry to look at a hundred-year plan instead of a few years down the road. We're stuck on this economic development driver that states that it's our right to extract resources and it's for the common good. But it's only for short-term gain.... We're getting more efficient at destroying the planet faster. We're spoiled...and we're letting a certain number of people brainwash us to think we're doing something good.

JAKELINE: There are these large problems we are facing. But there are also the everyday problems of, what are we going to eat? How are we going to eat? So what I really appreciate here [at the workshop] is that there are small ideas, and alternatives, that can be really useful and helpful while we are facing these global issues.... It's really helpful that

processed (or processed only to a limited degree), especially for export. Extractivism is not limited to minerals or oil” (p. 62); it also characterizes industrial farming, forestry, and fishing.

we connect to other people, especially women, who are in struggles in different places.... They give us courage because they are also having small successes in their problems. The more that we can connect with local groups, national groups, and international groups, this not only puts pressure on companies, but also puts pressure on civil society. We need global solidarity to confront all this, and we need to arm ourselves to confront this global crime.

CHIEF PLANES: We can get a lot of work done when we walk the forest and paddle the canoes together.

Jakeline and Miguel, at various points, distinguished between “large” actions and “small,” mobilization and tradition. Chief Planes emphasized the transformative potential of seemingly small and local action. They broadly agreed, though, on the goal of subverting the extractive economic model that has had devastating impacts on their food systems and territories, undermining ecosystem and community health and well-being. Walking the forest and paddling the big community canoe together provided important moments of recognition, moments when shared core values, and intersections between “large” and “small” actions, came into focus. Chief Planes and Jakeline both referred to the investments in relationship building that underpin Indigenous peoples’ interactions within their own communities, and that ground positive relationships with other societies, governments, agencies, and corporations. Relationships over shared “deep stories” (Habib, this issue), however—relationships cultivated while walking the forest and paddling the canoes—are distinct from the kinds of transactional, strategic relationships with mining companies that Miguel described. Recent engagements between Wayuu and mining corporations represent, as Miguel indicated, tentative steps in the direction of strategic relationship—yet the corporations’ entanglement in much longer-term practices of dispossession, failure to consult, and extraction may mean that the “relational tipping point” has already been crossed, even ahead of the ecological tipping point (Whyte, 2020). As Jakeline and Chief Planes argued, the most powerful relationships going forward are likely to be those of solidarity among people rejecting extractivist and colonial practices, and seeking to recentre sustainable, decolonial ways of life.

While Jordanian and South African farmers’ analyses tended to rest close to farm and home, they were not lacking in structural critique. Josephine spoke to challenges emanating from government policy in South Africa, particularly the state’s advocacy for industrial agricultural practices and commercialization of small-scale agriculture (Aliber & Hall, 2012; Bernstein, 2014; Prato, 2017). Industrial agriculture is a key form of extractivism, extracting maximum yield at the cost of the long-term health of soil, water, and air. Small-scale food producers are often responsive and improvisational in the face of challenges (Logan & Dores Cruz, 2014; Moore & Vaughan, 1993; Richards, 1985), as they reveal here. Josephine talked about threats facing the community vegetable garden she helped found thirty years ago.

JOSEPHINE [farmer, South Africa]: In the first few years, we farmed using compost and our own seeds and had good crops. But then the Ministry of Agriculture decided to take us to school, where they taught us a simple method—which was to use [chemical] fertilizers and pesticides. It did help, but on the other hand it was destroying our soil. It didn't happen [right away], but then after eight years of using the pesticides and fertilizers we were not able to farm *without* using the chemicals.... As we speak, our soil is completely dead. The government has destroyed our soil, and they will not help us heal it.

AYSHEH: When I was a child [in the 1960s], I would see the fields covered in yellow sulphur. Farmers would use sulphur as well as bird droppings as natural protection against pests and fungus.... When the fruit used to be transported from the West Bank to the East Bank, the organic fruit was so evident that you could smell the fruit even before the truck arrived. Today you can sniff the fruit right in your hand and not smell it, because it is covered in chemicals.

FATIMA: We do share the problem of the use of chemicals, and the problem of dead soil. However, the government has a concerted effort to provide heritage seed [for grains in Jordan].

IMAD [researcher, Jordan]: For the cereals like wheat and barley, the government does not allow any import of hybrid seed from outside. We still grow the original cereals, improved by plant breeding. For the government this is food security. On the other hand, we don't have the law of [agricultural] land use. Most of the agricultural land is now cities.... One-third of Jordan's population is refugees, especially from Palestine, Iraq, and Syria. That forced immigration increased the number of people. Where Aysheh lives is a Palestinian refugee camp, the name is Baqa'a. It was the basket of vegetables and fruit for export. Now, it's a crowded city.

The farmers and Imad were joined by T'Sou-ke plant specialist Christine George in making the case for protecting heritage varieties and farming methods as a means to a sustainable food future.

IMAD: People here have asked “why would we return to traditional methods of farming?” We don't just return for the sake of it, but because it is a sustainable farming method. Through my work with UN FAO in Syria, some people there were under siege for three years without food imported from the outside. But they still had some land, some water, and the heritage seeds, which they grew to protect them from hunger. Only the use of these heritage seeds allowed them to survive the siege.

CHRISTINE: The seeds that we save we are able to use year after year, that's the whole idea of our community garden. I started the garden with my own heritage seeds. And we've been using the same seeds for years, because we know they will flourish here.

Defining roles of climate and place

Impacts of the climate crisis brought local and global concerns into immediate relation. Water was a central topic, since every region involved in the workshop is facing crises related to water.

JOSEPHINE: The climate has changed a lot in South Africa. We can't predict when the rain is coming, and I can't remember when we last had good rain. Our parents would grow rain-fed food, and would have very good harvests. Now we don't have rain. Not even one river has water.... With the little water that we have, we have to water vegetables and traditional crops [but] crops from rain produce more and are more nutritious.... Our country is very hot now, even working at the farm is hard because it is very hot.

FATIMA: Although traditional farming methods are part of what gives people identity, and are very important for preserving the heritage of the region, it is also important to learn modern farming because of issues of climate change.... In my cooperative in northern Jordan, my main effort is to help young women provide for their families. So I teach them traditional *and* modern methods, so that they can sell crops for a profit and support their families. Hydroponics is used as a model to train not only local farmers, but also by the faculty of agriculture to train future agricultural engineers. For Jordan this is important, because this modern technology allows us to use less water and less chemicals.... We need to use technology to help feed people, not for destruction.

IMAD: Fatima talks about hydroponic or soilless growing. We are beginning to use this technology in Jordan. We use this because of our lack of water: it saves more than 50% of water, and more than 50% of fertilizer.

AYSHEH: We get water once every ten days in Jordan. In Canada you can open the tap whenever and the water will come out, you don't need to keep a tank of water. [In Jordan] every family and every household must have a water tank, and more water [is delivered] only every 10 days.... Whatever budget women have to buy food, they also have to budget for potable water.

MIGUEL: Because of the particularity of our region, where it doesn't rain very much, the government has tried to help [with new crops]. The problem is that they have provided types of foods that are not our foods, that are not native to us. One example is eggplant. We are growing lots of eggplant, but the Wayuu do not eat it because it is not their food. Not even the goats eat the eggplants.

CLAUDIA [researcher, Colombia]: There are families who have not been able to harvest their crops for four years because of lack of water.

JAKELINE: Water is the root of our culture. If we do not have water, we cannot grow our traditional maize, and without maize we cannot make our traditional foods and drinks. Our foods are disappearing, and the younger women are not learning to prepare the traditional foods.... All of these activities have become more difficult because of drought and the lack of water. It's the women who get the water, it's the women who feed their families, and so it's the women who are most affected. The women have to walk to the sources of water, and [those sources] are becoming further and fewer. And the drought has created crop failures, so there is less food as well. Without water, our culture cannot survive. We continue to insist that we will cultivate and work the land as we can, and in a very dry area. But desertification is growing and making it very difficult to cultivate. Our elders tell us that, traditionally, for those long droughts, people would prepare ahead of time. In the last 35 years or so, in the Wayuu language, there is a word that means the times, the climate has gone crazy: *amaamainajasü tüü kaikalirua*. Because for the past 35 years, these [drought] periods have not been predictable. So now it is really difficult to predict when the rains will come or when they will stop, much more difficult than it used to be.

The disproportionate burdens of women in the face of climate crisis, from accessing water to growing crops to managing dwindling household resources, were a frequent subject of conversation. Water symbolizes and materializes those burdens, which operate at two levels: the level of the daily burdens of women, who perform the bulk of the work of social reproduction, and the level of the systemic forces of the gendered global political economy. Josephine and Jakeline's observations about challenges to women's food production, and Aysheh's about women's water budget, provide insight into the grounded experience of a deepening water crisis. "Solutions" offered by government and by external organizations (e.g., encouraging women to grow introduced crops that not even the animals will eat) are emblematic of inept development initiatives that fail to consult the beneficiaries—often women (Pérez Piñán & Vibert, 2019).

While discussion of global pressures and local challenges sparked sometimes tense conversations, place-based activities on T'Sou-ke lands and waters brought people together. Early on, Jakeline admitted that her expectations for a "Canadian Indigenous village" had been disappointed. She had anticipated "bears and whales" and plenty of Indigenous people. The group hike in the forest reassured her. Listening to a researcher tell the history of T'Sou-ke relationships to the land through maps, and hearing Christine George and Chief Planes explain cultural relationships with the diverse life of the forest, settled Jakeline's mind. Being with T'Sou-ke people, "in relation with the space, and to see how Fatima was continually relating to the plants—that took me mentally to my territory," Jakeline said. Imad remarked on how the forest facilitated communication.

IMAD: Christine was another person [in the forest], she was very proud to share her knowledge about all the plants and the land. And with

Fatima, even though there was no language between them, Christine was excited to share her knowledge.

For Fatima, the forest evoked thoughts of loss that bridged spatial and cultural divides and offered deep political resonance.

FATIMA: When I was walking today in the forest, I felt the forest was holding an extra weight of responsibility, trying to keep itself alive, while at the same time missing the people who used to care for it. Missing the people who used to...take care of the being. The emptiness made me think of the emptiness Palestine must have felt when its people were expelled. Palestine must have felt like the forest, a forest without its people.

BIKRUM: Thank you for saying this. It's a reminder that the work we are doing here is not just about food, but about freedom and politics.

Toward the end of the workshop, Jakeline and Chief Planes drew a general lesson on the connections between local and global exploitation and local and global resistance.

JAKELINE: We come finally to the global injustices. Keep us [together] in resistance...in continuing persistence and survival in our homes. We have this relation of wanting to care for our place, we have things in common. We insist on taking care of this place because it is our territory.

CHIEF PLANES: If we are going to do anything on this earth, I think we are going to have to do it together... The creator is talking to us right now, and I don't think many people around the world are listening. We have to open their ears. We have a problem, and we all need to work together to fix it. I don't know the answers, but we have to work together to find them.

JAKELINE: We dream and we come together in this exercise, sharing our experiences in creating new forms of economies. I agree with Chief Planes that we need to continue working together...work together to repair things in local ways—even though it has not been our responsibility that the problems were caused.

Discussion

Jakeline's words return us to the paradox posed at the outset: transformation, or "local repair," of violences enacted from elsewhere?⁷ Jakeline was among those who repeatedly reminded participants of the depth and breadth of crises emanating from the extractive economic model,

⁷ "Elsewhere" in settler colonial states need not be geographically distant: violence from elsewhere might be transnational capital, or it might be the settler right here on Indigenous land.

and who said, “we all have one common enemy, which is the [extractive] economic system.” Yet here Jakeline speaks of local repair. Aysheh’s trajectory went the other way: “the challenges I considered to be local are actually shared by others around the world.” The distinctive common ground of the workshop, where we worked across difference toward a “shared understanding of what must be valued in a sustainable food system” (McInnes & Mount, 2016, p. 338), facilitated these shifts in perspective. It also shone light on vexing questions: in documenting and celebrating everyday, grounded resistance and action, such as the restoration of native foodscapes, do we risk obscuring, or even reproducing, the very structures of power that threaten food justice? On the other hand, in focusing at the level of structures, do we devalue the transformative, radical potential of Indigenous action in place? The latter seems the greater risk. As Nishnaabeg geographer Madeline Whetung (2016) argues, Indigeneity is not located in colonialism, but rather emanates from place-based relations: “Indigenous and colonial geographies live in layers in the same places” (p. 12), and raising up the Indigenous landscape through the dominating colonial layer is an essential decolonial act. Chief Planes emphasized that the lessons from the elders “are priceless, they teach us how to live in a sustainable way.” Absorbing those lessons, and demonstrating them to others, opens and expands spaces of possibility for structural change. At the same time, Chief Planes and Jakeline remind us that the major obstacle to just food systems in T’Sou-ke, Wayuu, and many other Indigenous territories is the institution of private property rights that grants effective sovereignty over land and resources to extractive industries. For Palestinians and South Africans too, settler-colonial power—in forms ranging from private property to white supremacy—remains the greatest obstacle to flourishing.

We came away from the workshop convinced that small-scale, everyday acts of worldmaking and resurgence are critical to defending and renewing the place-based knowledge and practice that forms the ground for structural transformation. As Secwepemc educator Dawn Morrison (2020) insists, “remembering our original instructions encoded within our kin-centric relationships to the land, water, people, plants, and animals” is the route to food sovereignty, “one of the most basic yet profound ways in which we express Indigeneity” (p. 21). Discussing and strategizing about such acts, across geographies, created energy and a measure of optimism. As Jakeline and Chief Planes insisted, working together is critical—even if the work is in different places. Knowing others are engaged in similar struggles is affirming and motivating; as Jakeline put it, “it’s really helpful that we can connect...they give us courage.” The courage to commit to place-based knowledge and practice, in the face of pressures to the contrary, is at the heart of *sumud* and worldviews of spiralling time outlined earlier. The food sovereignty strategies shared and reflected upon at the workshop both preserve traditions and seed the ground for change. This potential is powerfully captured in Aysheh’s understanding of the significance of her work preserving Palestinian grain milling and processing. Her traditional techniques help sustain the daily health and dignity of her community in exile, and they affirm an intergenerational promise to keep alive the cultural and ecological sensibilities essential to building a decolonized Palestine. Aysheh’s grains support transformation *and* the next meal; the

politics of resistance and return are in the next meal. The daily activities of the women at the South African farm resemble *sumud*. They seek to farm with the methods of their mothers and grandmothers, adapted for changing conditions; they farm for the community, in the face of governance and economic systems that prioritize commercial farming; and they persist in growing food despite extreme heat and years-long drought. Reflecting on workshop conversations about restorative practices in agriculture, farmer Mphephu Mtsenga said, “We are going to take these lessons and try them.... Only the brave will do this.” These are defiant, resistant, and generative actions. They are the actions of women seeking to persist in their roles as food provisioners for their households and communities despite structural hurdles that make the activity well-nigh impossible. On T’Sou-ke lands, Christine remains steadfast in the face of the private property rights of forestry companies by taking youth “on walks through the forest, identifying and explaining the properties of native plants.” In doing so, she seeds the renewal of a deeper ancestral time of food forests that will raise up Indigenous landscapes and outlast the extractivist power of tree farm licences. Jakeline articulates a similar vision in her repeated entreaties to “keep us [together] in resistance...in continuing persistence and survival in our homes.”

Morrison (2020) writes of the “ancient food-related ecosocial and spiritual protocols and ceremonial ways of knowing” (p. 21) that continue to be practised by Indigenous peoples all over the world. Indigenous food sovereignty, she explains, emanates outward “from the tiniest scale of micro-organisms that give life to the rich soils...[toward] the contemplative traditions and rituals that enact our world” (Morrison, 2020, p. 21) at the scale of the individual, family, community, and Indigenous nation. These worldmaking activities see “young and old hands” continuing to “plant the seeds of ancestral knowledge and prepare the way for generations to come” (Gilpin & Hayes, 2020, p. 104). From the smallest acts of daily life comes the power for cultural resurgence.

Conclusion

The 2019 workshop described here launched the Four Stories About Food Sovereignty transnational research project. Research activities were largely suspended when the pandemic hit, as partner communities turned their focus to intersecting food, health, and unemployment crises that remind us again of the fragilities highlighted at the workshop. We resumed community-led research, including documentary filmmaking, in mid-2022. The conversations presented here suggest that structural transformation finds its point of take-off in the place-based “foundations of Indigenous decolonial thought and practice”—the land- and water-connected practices and knowledge that “inform and structure ethical engagements with the world” (Coulthard, 2014, p. 13). It is these everyday actions and relationships that empower

communities to refuse extractive systems of colonial-capitalist power, and to reinvigorate ancestral worlds that are integral to sustainable futures.

Our opening question, “transformation or the next meal?” was revealed as a false binary. The “or” came to be replaced by “and,” and we reversed the order. In the nature of the next meal, it seems, lie the seeds of transformative change. By persisting, and insisting on honouring ancestral ethics, earth-sustaining practices, and “deep stories” of conservation and restoration, Indigenous peoples across the globe enact the worldmaking renewal described by Whyte (2017). While place is fundamental to action for sustainable change, the workshop demonstrated the potential for ideas and practices of ethical food provisioning and political organization to travel, and, in the traveling, to gain momentum. Such solidarities among people seeking to recentre decolonial ways of life are crucial to sustainable futures. Encounters at the workshop captured the spirit and practical value of farmer-to-farmer transmission of agroecological and political knowledge across difference and space (see also Holt-Giménez, 2006; Kerr et al., 2022 this issue). Mphephu beautifully held such a spirit when she noted that “the brave” will “take these lessons and try them.” Alongside Aysheh, we deepened our understanding that challenges often imagined as local “are actually shared by others around the world,” a sentiment elaborated by Jakeline’s reminder that “we have things in common. We insist on taking care of this place because it is our territory.” These words demonstrate what we might consider an emergent transnational *sumud*, as Indigenous peoples support one another in remaining steadfast in their care for their territories, and in their efforts to outlast colonial capitalism. To realize the common aim of just and sustainable food systems, Jakeline called for “global solidarity...to arm ourselves to confront this global crime” of extractive economy. Finally, Fatima reminded us that “every land has its own seed” of structural transformation.

Cultivated alongside one another, these seeds have the potential to create earth-sustaining futures. Realizing that potential requires wider action—a movement, or allied movements, combining advocacy with grounded action and building pressure for policy change. Many pieces are in place within global, and local, movements for Indigenous rights and land back, racial justice, gender justice, climate justice, labour rights, and others. These movements share certain concerns, and often have sharply differing priorities. Convergence across difference is possible, we found at the workshop, if those at the table are willing to respect and accommodate diverse priorities, pull on threads of commonality where they exist, and “keep together in resistance” for just food futures.

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