



Editorial

Towards just food futures: Divergent approaches and possibilities for collaboration across differenceMarit Rosol^{a*}, Eric Holt-Giménez^b, Lauren Kepkiewicz^c, and Elizabeth Vibert^a University of Calgary^b Director Emeritus, Food First/Institute for Food and Development Policy^c University of Manitoba^d University of Victoria

Abstract

The call for *Just Food Futures* reflects a desire to address social inequities, health disparities, and environmental disasters created by overlapping systems of oppression including capitalism, white supremacy, and heteropatriarchy. Many food movement actors share a desire to meaningfully tackle these issues, however, the richness and broadness of the food movement does not come without problems. The challenge of engaging with the intersectional nature of food-based inequities is apparent in the tensions between distinctive food organizations and movements and their sometimes-conflicting goals, approaches, tactics, and strategies. This Themed Section brings together some of the contributions to and reflections from a virtual three-day workshop held in May 2021 in which we aimed at better understanding the differing approaches, the spaces in which they work, and where we explored collaborative possibilities within, between, and beyond food movements. In this Introduction we share reflections from the guest editors. To explore how food movements can collaborate in solidarity while not negating differences, we first identify key frictions within and between food-related movements and why they persist. Second, we suggest three strategic orientations that may help to explore collaborative possibilities within, between, and beyond food movements: learning from other movements, fostering political literacy, and engaging with tensions productively. Finally, we consider the role and responsibility of academics within these conversations. We close with a call for (re)politization across difference and relate this back to strategies for broader social transformations.

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DOI: 10.15353/cfs-rcea.v9i2.598

ISSN: 2292-3071

Keywords: Food movements; justice; pre-figuration; strategy; state; community; academics; public sphere

Introduction: (Re)politicization across difference

Food studies is an eclectic field of study, incorporating disciplines from technical, biological, and social sciences, moving from the molecular to the global. The field is characterized by a broad array of perspectives that reflect the diversity, tensions, and contradictions within food movements, as they seek to keep up with a changing food regime and the explosive growth of food organizations (Holt-Giménez & Shattuck, 2011). Many food studies scholars and scholar-activists have worked with social movements as they contest the existing regime and attempt to construct alternatives, and their approaches are equally reflective of these tensions and contradictions. In this Introduction to the Themed Section, we explore how food movements can collaborate in solidarity while not negating differences. Specifically, we identify key frictions within and between food-related movements and offer strategic orientations that may help to explore collaborative possibilities within, between, and beyond food movements.

The voices in this Themed Section come from food activists and academic-activists who identify with a broad-based, and diverse collection of initiatives to bring progressive change to the food system. The title of the Themed Section, *Towards Just Food Futures*, reflects a desire to address the social inequities, health disparities, and environmental disasters created by overlapping systems of oppression, including capitalism, white supremacy, and heteropatriarchy, in favour of food systems that: feed everyone healthy, culturally appropriate food; ensure dignified livelihoods for farmers, fishers, hunters, gatherers and workers; decommodify land and food systems; value, support, and defend BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, People of Colour) foodways; and regenerate ecosystems.

The challenge of engaging with the intersectional¹ nature of food-based inequities is apparent in the tensions between distinctive food movements and their conflicting goals, approaches, tactics, and strategies. For instance,² tensions may arise between initiatives that offer local or alternative food—often based on market mechanisms—and those seeking to regulate or dismantle corporate market power; between approaches that focus on social justice issues and those that emphasize ecological sustainability; between community food security organizations

¹ Intersectional approaches, originating with critical race feminists in the 1970s, underline and analyze the ways that multiple systems of oppression relate to, reinforce, and uphold one another in specific contexts, and call for the dismantling of each of these systems of oppression (Combahee River Collective, 1977; Crenshaw, 1991; Hill Collins, 2019; Razack, 1998). Intersectional theory also underlines the problematics of progressive politics that attend to only one system of oppression, whether that be patriarchy, capitalism, or white supremacy.

² The following list is illustrative rather than exhaustive, and the tensions are often not so binary.

that work for dignified food access, and approaches that shift attention towards income, welfare, and labour policy; between approaches that understand, interact with, and value the state in divergent ways; between those that struggle for international solidarity, and those that focus on very localized communities; between those that seek to confront, resist, and combat a powerful agri-food industry, and others that seek to educate, dialogue, and build relationships at a community level. Such tensions can result in divides and differences in priority setting, sectoral policy divisions, single-issue activism, and a lack of awareness or contact between advocacy groups.

To better understand how food movements can (re)politicize³ across difference and possibly “converge in diversity” (Amin, 2011) to build solidarity, we first identify key frictions within and between food-related movements and ask why they persist. Second, we suggest strategic orientations that may help explore collaborative possibilities within, between, and beyond food movements. Finally, we consider the role of academics within these conversations. We close with a call for (re)politicization across difference and relate this back to strategies for broader social transformations.

This Themed Section and the reflections within this article are based on a virtual three-day workshop organized by the guest editors in May 2021. At the workshop, authors and guest editors came together in a series of Open Space discussions, an affinity mapping exercise, and a session where we clarified our respective visions for just food futures. Of central focus to our conversations were the tensions that often stand in the way of collaboration—and how different approaches to creating just food futures might work together.

These tensions were also felt in writing this introduction. Less by accident than by design, we four co-authors come from different spaces within food’s arena of struggle. In our discussion many of the tensions and contradictions we identify below arose between us and complicated the collective writing process. While we came to a shared decision on how to write this Introduction, our differences are still reflected in the broad and sometimes unruly array of perspectives we present. At the same time, these difficult conversations presented a valuable opportunity for learning and deeper engagement. We believe that these disagreements point precisely to the need to further engage with a variety of critical perspectives to bring them into continuing, critical, yet respectful dialogue. Overall, our own “working through and across difference” has greatly enriched our understanding of food movements and the issues they face. Nonetheless, despite representing some diversity, we also recognize that the following discussion is still situated, partial, and necessarily incomplete, informed by our own particular experiences and social locations. Most importantly, this review predominantly engages English language critical food literature and is biased toward examples from North America.

³ We use (re)politicization in recognition that while many new social movements have undergone a process of depoliticization in recent decades, some lack that history of politicization altogether. At the same time, we recognize that organizing and movement building by particular groups such as Indigenous resurgence movements remain focused on challenging capitalist economies and colonial nation-states, as they have done for centuries (see Ladner, 2014).

Tensions and obstacles to collaboration

We begin by outlining what we see as key tensions. Many of these key tensions, often overlapping and overarching, affect social movements in general while having specific implications for food movements. In order to explore tensions within and between food movements,⁴ it is important to understand that they are part of new social movements that have arisen over the last sixty years. The diversity of twenty-first-century social movements draws on important histories and longstanding resistance struggles, bringing tremendous richness to this emergent “movement of movements.” New ways of thinking, relating, and organizing have helped these movements address some of the political orthodoxies, biases, and hierarchies that have plagued radical and progressive political movements in the past.

At the same time, and as important context for the following discussion, many of these new social movements have been through a decades-long process of de-politicization that has pushed governments and significant sectors of civil society politically to the right and diluted critiques of capitalism, white supremacy, colonialism, and patriarchy. This has happened in a context of: 1) the rise of neoliberal capitalism, which has stagnated wages, undermined labour power, privatized public goods, ravaged the world’s resources, heated the planet, and exacerbated inequalities; 2) ongoing racism that continues to normalize violence against BIPOC communities and individuals, threatening their daily existence and deepening disparities in physical and mental health, employment, income, housing, education, and criminal justice; 3) ongoing colonialism that erodes Indigenous Nations’ rights to land and sovereign governance systems, at a time when lands are increasingly degraded and state responses to Indigenous resistance are characterized by violence and further dispossession; and 4) notwithstanding some progress the continuing dominance of heteropatriarchy, which breeds gender-based violence, subjugation, and discrimination towards LGBTQTS+ and women-identifying people.

The disjuncture between pre-figurative and strategic politics

Strategic and pre-figurative approaches offer different visions and a different practice for social change. The prefigurative-versus-strategic binary, and tensions between “fighting the power or being the change,” date back decades in progressive politics (Engler & Engler, 2014). “Being the change we wish to see in the world,” or *pre-figurative politics*, characterizes much of the work in food movements today. Community gardens, organic farming, farmers’ markets, food hubs, food pantries, food collectives, and co-operatives are among the many pre-figurative ways

⁴ Wilson & Levkoe (2022, this issue) define food movements as “a collection of formal and informal organizations and individuals actively seeking to ensure food systems are more equitable, healthy, and sustainable.... Food movements cannot be understood within a set of fixed boundaries, but rather should be conceived as a fluid network of relationships and collaborations between individuals and organizations” (p.104)

communities and individuals strive to address their immediate needs for healthy food while building alternatives to the corporate food regime.

Strategic approaches, on the other hand, try to “change the rules of the game” and range from advocates lobbying to reform food assistance (e.g., Poppendieck, 2022, this issue), defending the integrity of organic standards, or seeking to dismantle concentrated animal feeding operations (CAFOs), to wider-ranging campaigns toward redistributive agrarian reform (Borras Jr., 2010), the breakup of global food monopolies, and Indigenous food sovereignty efforts that demand land back (The Red Nation, 2021). Struggles for farm parity (fair incomes for farmers) and supply management (to control environmentally-damaging overproduction and market saturation), anti-trust work, the right to food, labour organizing with food and farm workers, and food regulation, all strive to *strategically* influence the rules and structures that govern our food system.

Even though those aiming to create alternative food niches cannot afford to ignore structural dynamics,⁵ approaches aiming at structural change are often less visible and more difficult to communicate to a broader public, at least in the North American context. Tensions between the pre-figurative and the strategic—over everything from priorities, tactics, and alliances to funding models—and the absence of a standing political forum for sharing, discussion, and debate, deepens divisions and weakens the potential of alliances.

Tensions: livelihoods, affordability, sustainability

Related to the discussion on pre-figurative versus strategic approaches, tensions exist between approaches that try to address immediate food needs in a dignified way, such as Community Food Centres (see Habib, 2022, this issue) and other Community Food Security organizations, and those that argue for the need to redirect attention from food towards income, welfare, and labour policy. Proponents of the latter approach argue that a focus on food ultimately leads towards charitable rather than systemic responses (Tung et al., 2022, this issue; Power & McBay, 2022, this issue).

Similarly, and despite work to overcome divisions, frictions continue to exist between activism and scholarship focused on environmental sustainability versus social justice (Morgan & Santo, 2018; Sonnino et al., 2019). For example, environmentally focused initiatives sometimes attribute the problem of food system ecological degradation to a lack of education and food literacy within poorer households, ignoring the daily realities of low-income households; while income-based and food access-oriented organizations may neglect the environmental damage caused by “cheap food” (Rosol & Rosol, 2022). Similarly, higher prices at farmers’ markets and other direct marketing venues have been criticized for creating a two-tiered food

⁵ For example, agribusiness sets conditions that “undermine the ability of even the most committed producers to practice a purely alternative form of organic farming”(Guthman, 2004, pp. 301-302) and continues to drive wider processes of agro-industrialisation that are almost impossible to escape.

system in which local organic food is inaccessible to lower income households, reserving “good food” for elites (Alkon & Agyeman, 2011; Friedmann, 2005). While this presents a very legitimate critique and caution, food insecurity has also been strategically used to argue for cheap food, which ultimately denies farmers dignified livelihoods.

Such divisions, and the neglect of the structures that cause all these challenges—from the farm crisis over environmental degradation to household food insecurity—allow conventional and right-wing actors to pit agriculture against environmental goals like clean water, biodiversity, and climate protection; farmers against environmentalists; and decent incomes for farmers (parity) against the buying power of low-income consumers (van der Ploeg, 2020; Rosol & Rosol, 2022).

How to understand and engage with the state

Further tensions relate to the multiple ways that food movement actors understand and interact with the state. There are tensions between those who see the state as a central player and terrain for struggle in facilitating just food futures (e.g., Barbosa Jr. & Coca, 2022, this issue; Poppendieck 2022, this issue; Power & McBay, 2022, this issue) and those who advocate for working outside and/or against the state, for example, food justice activists who decry the generations of state violence imposed on racialized communities (Black Creek Food Justice Network [BCFJN], n.d.). For example, some practitioners, especially in agriculture, may see the state as unnecessarily interfering with their work and are critical of the particularly high standards (imposed by state regulation) that pose a significant burden and obstacle to small-scale producers. While these criticisms may be legitimate, their outright rejection of the state sometimes echoes libertarian sentiments that ultimately support ideas of laissez-faire capitalism and individualism.

In settler colonial contexts such as Canada, another tension related to the state can be seen between Indigenous food sovereignty activists who assert the long-term goal of dismantling the settler colonial state (D. Morrison, 2011; Indigenous Circle & Food Secure Canada, 2011), and settler activists who insist that the state is “here to stay” and/or maintain a heavy focus on the state as *the* central arbiter of the right to food (Kepkiewicz, 2020). While there might be agreement on particular goals—for instance, on the need to influence state policies to allow people better access to healthy, nutritious, and culturally-appropriate foods, or building policy frameworks for more equitable land access and land tenure—there is division over how much of their time and energy food movements should invest in influencing state policies.

Financing the work: the long political tail of philanthrocapitalism

The outsourcing and privatization of state services towards volunteers combined with the private and non-profit sector in recent decades (Bondi & Laurie, 2005; Rosol, 2010; see also Lloro et al., 2022, this issue) has increased dependence on philanthropy from NGOs, community groups, and charities (see MacKinnon, 2000, p. 298). Philanthropy—and more recently, philanthrocapitalism⁶—has a profound influence in our food systems, from Ford and Rockefeller’s funding of the original Green Revolution in the 1960s, through the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation’s more recent support for GMOs and a new “Green Revolution” for Africa (see Holt-Giménez et al., 2009). Moreover, in the U.S., for example, while powerful philanthro-capitalists have built out corporate agriculture by financing research centres and think tanks, smaller, liberal leaning foundations are left to finance popular food movements.

Little of this liberal funding goes to progressive think tanks, grassroots resistance movements, or academic research to support agroecology and food justice. Instead, these foundations support projects that provide welfare in a period of disappearing social services and public goods. This funding has the effect of steering grassroots efforts away from strategic activities to transform political-economic structures, and towards pre-figurative projects focused on local food production and equitable access. In Canada, this funding structure further marginalises NGOs run by people of colour, discouraging anti-racist and anti-capitalist organizing, and instead prompts “migrants and migrant serving NGOs to aspire towards neoliberal (read: white) citizenship to gain recognition from the Canadian state and society as legitimate and responsible neoliberal citizens” (Cahuas, 2018, p. 60; see also Bannerji, 2000; Ilcan & Basok, 2004). Cahuas names this the “white neoliberal non-profit funding structure” (2018, p. 68).

While progressive foundations (in North America) are the financial mainstay for initiatives that range from agroecology efforts to small projects for food entrepreneurialism, relatively little money goes to non-agrarian food provisioning such as Indigenous hunting and gathering and activities that engage in land back advocacy. While right-wing foundations lavishly finance conservative think tanks in order to manufacture consent favorable to the corporate food regime, progressive foundations pick up the pieces by addressing the symptoms, rather than causes, of hunger, malnutrition, and environmental damage. Even as they attempt to fill the neoliberal gap in public services, these funders cannot adequately fund the plethora of NGOs they have spawned, leading to competition, rather than collaboration.⁷

⁶ Philanthrocapitalism “promises to save the world by revolutionizing philanthropy, making non-profit organizations operate like business, and creating new markets for goods and services that benefit society...its supporters believe that business principles can be successfully combined with the search for social transformation” (Edwards, 2008, p. 8).

⁷ According to the U.S. Department of State there are 1.5 million NGOs in the United States alone. See: <https://www.state.gov/non-governmental-organizations-ngos-in-the-united-states/>, last accessed 2022/03/31.

Addressing the root causes of food injustice will entail securing finance for social movements capable of ending the abuses of food monopolies and demanding adequate public goods and services from government regardless of race, gender, and citizenship status. This requires a reset of the funding model currently heavily reliant on philanthropy.

How do we move forward? Strategic orientations

We do not pretend to have the answers on how to overcome these tensions and challenges—how could we? However, based on the articles that form this collection, the discussions during the workshop, and our own work, we propose three strategic orientations that may help to move us towards the (re)politicization of food movements and the creation of new solidarities that value difference: 1) Learn from other movements; 2) Expand political literacy; 3) Engage with tensions productively.

Building solidarity with and learning from other movements

Developing alliances

The most significant examples of twenty-first-century political resistance and social mobilization in North America—including Occupy, Black Lives Matter, Fight for \$15, #MeToo, Climate Justice, Idle No More, LandBack, and the struggles of the Dakota Water Protectors, Wet’suwet’en, and Tiny House Warriors⁸— have largely taken place outside of food movements. We believe it is important for food movements to build lasting and active alliances with struggles for labour, gender equity, Indigenous sovereignty, climate justice, and other justice and decolonizing movements. Building alliances *across* movements seeking radical system change provides space to contribute to diverse advocacy and frontline work, support movement building that goes beyond food, and learn from diverse experiences, strategies and tactics (Kepkiewicz et al., 2015).

However, not all alliances lead to fundamental social change. As Freire notes, “The great humanistic and historical task of the oppressed is to liberate themselves and their oppressors as well. The oppressors, who oppress, exploit, and rape by virtue of their power, cannot find in this power, the strength to liberate the oppressed or themselves. Only power that springs from the weakness of the oppressed will be sufficiently strong to free both” (1968/2005, p. 44).

⁸ For further information on these movements see: <https://blacklivesmatter.com/>; <https://fightfor15.org/>; <https://www.indigenousclimateaction.com/>; <https://climatejusticealliance.org/>; <https://idlenomore.ca/>; <https://landback.org/>; <https://unistoten.camp/>; <https://www.yintahaccess.com/>; <http://www.tinyhousewarriors.com/>, last accessed 2022/03/31.

How do we know if a particular alliance builds the power of the oppressed? This is impossible to answer without analyzing whether it builds *political power of the oppressed*. Calls for (re)politicization of food movements respond to the urgency to consciously build political power in the face of ongoing colonialism, neoliberal retrenchment, and the rise of white nationalism, right-wing illiberalism, and proto-fascism. These calls also respond to the need to build solidarity across difference, with an emphasis on building relationships with radical grassroots movements actively dismantling broader systems of oppression. As Wayuu human rights activist Jakeline Romero Epiayu insists in the article by Vibert et al. (2022, this issue), we must “keep together in resistance” (p. 244).

A renewed focus on the power of labour in the food system

It is difficult to imagine transforming the food system without bold activism from food and farm workers—the largest and most exploited labour sector in the world (Böhm et al., 2020). Food movements are beginning to pay more attention to the power of labour, as evidenced by the importance given to food chain worker struggles (see Kerr et al., 2022, this issue; Klassen et al., 2022, this issue; Weiler et al., this issue).⁹ If big food and corporate agriculture were forced to pay living wages and provide adequate benefits to their workers, it may help level the playing field between smaller, family firms and farms, and giant food monopolies. Additionally, if nation states such as Canada changed policies in response to demands from migrant worker organizations to provide permanent immigration status for all, it may help to address the racial discrimination and worker exploitation currently embedded in programs such as the Seasonal Agricultural Workers Program and the Temporary Foreign Workers Program (Justice for Migrant Workers [J4MW], 2022). These massive changes cannot come about through the purchasing power of consumers “voting with their fork”. The key is the power of workers, who have the potential to *shut down* production, distribution, and service through strikes and other means of direct action. For example, as we have seen during COVID-19, CAFOs or food processing plants can disrupt the supply chain. Unfortunately, little work has been done by North American food movements in organizing together with workers. When food workers’ labour demands are placed squarely within the vision for food system transformation, food movements will be backed by powerful forms of political activism. Opportunities to work along the whole supply chain abound, suggesting the strategic possibility for expansion of transformative political power.

⁹ Some of the most visible projects within food movements, including food pantries, food banks, and lobby work for government food programs, aim to benefit low wage food and farm workers, but often fail to reach the most vulnerable workers (such as undocumented food workers and migrant workers in isolated rural contexts). As government assistance shrinks in volume and onerous work requirements increase, food aid is increasingly a subsidy to low-wage *employers*—amounting to a neoliberal “capture” of a reformist program that further perpetuates racial inequities.

Unconditional support for BIPOC and LGBTQTS+-led movements

While building alliances with food workers will entail engagement with people marginalized by race and class, we believe it is important for food movements to work specifically with movements led by BIPOC and LGBTQTS+ peoples, including those unrelated to food. Doing so will mean that food activists support these movements “in their efforts without attempting to control the dialogue or to enroll other justice activists in their own food-related initiatives” (Kepkiewicz et al., 2015, p. 102).

Centering voices and experiences from other movements (see Klassen et al., 2022, this issue) will mean changing how food movements work, what they value, the scope of their work, and their radical potential. It entails understanding the ways that different movements’ aims and goals may be “incommensurable” (Tuck and Yang, 2012, p.28).¹⁰ It entails food movements amplifying the demands of BIPOC and LGBTQTS+ groups, even when those demands are not food related. Food movements may not receive immediate, tangible benefits from such alliances; rather, the value of these alliances lies in their role in challenging broader systems of oppression and supporting the work of those who experience multiple forms of oppression.

While there is always potential for violence and power inequities when forging relationships across difference, when done with self-reflexivity, care (see Lloro & Gonzalez, 2022, this issue), and commitment to anti-oppression, these relationships can be transformative—precisely because they encourage nuance, creativity, and flexibility rather than singular perspectives on how to move forward. For example, Klassen et al.’s work (2022, this issue) suggests that alliances between organic farmers and migrant workers have the potential to (re)politicize the organic farming movement in ways that demand fair wages, decent working conditions, and changes to racist citizenship structures.

Towards more political literacy

Understanding the “situation of society as a whole”

We argue that the power of food—its broad appeal across a wide spectrum of society, its low thresholds for engagement, and its many facets that allow for very different people from different backgrounds and motivations to find meaningful forms of engagement—also presents its greatest weakness. Food is such a broad category that it risks becoming apolitical—meaning that food movements often lack critical analysis. As one research participant articulated in Wilson and

¹⁰ Tuck and Yang (2012) suggest that an ethic of incommensurability may allow different movements/projects to recognize “what is distinctive, what is sovereign for project(s) of decolonization in relation to human and civil rights based social justice projects. There are portions of these projects that cannot speak to one another, cannot be aligned, or allied” (p. 28). Thus, they argue that “the opportunities for solidarity lie in what is incommensurable rather than what is common” (Tuck & Yang, 2012, p.28).

Levkoe’s study (2022, this issue), “people get stuck on good food rather than good politics,” (p.115) echoing the sentiment of another participant who noted, “I don’t think food is political in this country yet.” (p. 115).

Engaging in food movements does not require previous political activism. However, without people who bring this critical awareness and experience in organizing—for example from their work in anti-racist, feminist, or labour movements—and without deliberately engaging with and being led by critical perspectives and marginalized communities, food initiatives tend to reaffirm mainstream white, neoliberal ideas and practices. Over time, dominant groups in society dominate food organizations as well. While being open and empathetic, it is important to facilitate continuous critical reflections, debate and political education on structural and systemic problems, on forms of engagement, on inclusions and exclusions, and on blind spots. In short, we contend that what food movements need more than food literacy is *political literacy*, a key prerequisite for re-politicization.

Because the food system sits at the juncture of multiple social, environmental, and economic crises, food movements must confront wider crises: the climate crisis and the sixth mass extinction; the continuing dispossession, displacement, and genocide of Indigenous peoples; the unprecedented concentration of corporate wealth and exacerbation of inequality; and the rise of zoonotic pandemics are all challenges of growing global concern that impact and are impacted by the food system (Akram-Lodhi, 2020; Rosol & Rosol, 2022). Even the rise of right-wing nationalism, authoritarian populism, and proto-fascism is an issue for food-growing and rural communities (Scoones et al., 2021; Akram-Lodhi, 2021).

Thus, we borrow from Karl Polanyi’s (1944) insight that class struggles must understand “the situation of society as a whole” (p. 88) and apply it to food movements. This lesson underlines that the fate of food movements, their aspirations, goals, and demands will depend on whether they can obtain support from outside their own membership to address pressing social issues that are much wider than food. Achieving this understanding requires engaging with critical social theory and its analysis of the societies in which we live.

In the following section we highlight a few ways that critical social theory might support food movements in understanding the contexts in which they operate. We delve into two strands of critical theory—neo-Marxist theory and critical Indigenous studies—to further critical understandings of “community” and of the “state” which both figure prominently as addressee or terrain of action in food movement work. An idealized and often uncritical understanding of community—often portrayed as the antidote to neoliberal capitalism and the state—is present in many North American food movements. Additionally, the state remains poorly understood in many food movement spaces.

Of course, these are only two theoretical starting points, and there was in fact much discussion among the authors of this Introduction over which theories to centre within the limited space. We therefore encourage movements (and readers) to explore further theoretical bodies—including, for example, critical race theory, queer theory, intersectional feminism, fat studies, racial capitalism, critical disability studies, and postcolonialism. We hope the following insights

will help activists to make more strategic—rather than opportunistic—decisions about priorities, focus, and collaborations.

Role of community for neoliberal capitalism—Critique of neo-communitarianism

North American food movements (in particular those led primarily by white middle-class folks) often echo American neo-communitarians' (see e.g. Etzioni, 1993) praise for the community as an inclusive solution to social deprivation and an antidote to the dislocation, atomization, and individualism spurred by neoliberalism since it took hold in the 1980s (DeFilippis et al., 2006, pp. 675-678; Fyfe, 2005; Paddison, 2001, p. 195).¹¹ This neo-communitarian view of community has been criticized for at least three reasons. First, the romantic and nostalgic assumption of an inclusionary character of community is misleading. This is because community is mainly defined by its social and physical boundaries, i.e., by defining who is outside and excluded from it. A strong, active, socially cohesive community might be tied together “in an exclusionary, introverted and isolationist manner” (Kennett & Forrest, 2006, p. 714), and thus may contribute more to the fragmentation of society than to its inclusionary nature (Kearns & Forrest, 2000).

Second, internal differences—of ethnicity, gender, and income for example—within a community may be neglected, masked, or negated. Moreover, as Young (1986/2002) argues, this ideal of community does not only deny differences within and between subjects, but also denies society because “in privileging face-to-face relations it seeks a model of social relations that are not mediated by space and time distancing” (p. 432). Societal problems are seen from this perspective as problems of community building, identity, civic virtue, and individual and collective “values” (DeFilippis et al., 2006, p. 677). Third, the neo-communitarian approach does not challenge or acknowledge structural causes of the decline of community and lacks an analysis or vision of social change. The focus is on community *building*, not on community *organizing* in the sense of Saul Alinsky (DeFilippis et al., 2006, pp. 675, 677). In sum, the critique is on the ideal of “purified”, socially cohesive, and inclusionary communities and its “oppressive parochialism” (DeFilippis et al., 2006, p. 680), as well as its lack of a transformative vision of social change.

As Dean (1999) emphasizes, the neoliberal focus on the self-governing individual is not antithetical to that of community, but complementary. If the main rationale of liberal thought is “freedom” of “individuals” in a world where “there is no such thing as society” (Thatcher, 1987), the exercise of that freedom for responsible and autonomous subjects is voluntary association and voluntary work, i.e., in and for the “community” (Dean, 1999, p. 152). In this way, “community” is not only compensating for neoliberal and state failures (MacLeavy, 2008, p. 540; Mayer, 2003; Jessop, 2007a); it is the *necessary* connection of governing the self and

¹¹ From a feminist perspective, this emphasis on voluntary work not only diverts attention from state-provided service provision and the demands of the labour-market, but also puts a special burden on women, re-imposing a caring role on them (DeFilippis et al., 2006, pp. 677-678, see also Lloro et al., 2022, this issue).

governing a population and thus a cornerstone of neoliberal governmentality (cf. also Rosol, 2013, 2015).

Critical Indigenous Studies' understandings of resistance through community

In seeking to complicate the often uncritical championing of community as *the* space for enacting and creating change, we also find political potential in understandings of community developed in critical Indigenous scholarship as a body of work that “disrupts the certainty of disciplinary knowledges produced in the twentieth century” by foregrounding Indigenous ways of knowing and connections to place (Moreton-Robinson, 2016, p. 3).¹² Below, we draw from Critical Indigenous scholars based primarily in the “First World” in which Indigenous nations assert their sovereignty.¹³

Tuhiwai Smith (1999) writes that although many Indigenous communities have been shaped and contained by colonial policies, Indigenous communities “have also made themselves” (p. 126). For example, colonial policies and practices have attempted to erase and eradicate Indigenous communities and their sovereignties (a process on which settler state legitimacy relies), replacing them with the “doctrine of individualism and predatory capitalism” (Alfred & Corntassel, 2005, p. 603). Yet Indigenous communities can act as spaces of resurgence in which “Indigenous ontologies, laws, and relational responsibilities are being upheld” (Daigle, 2016, p. 268). Morrison (2020) finds the route to Indigenous food sovereignty in “remembering our original instructions encoded within our kin-centric relationships to the land, water, people, plants, and animals” (p.21). Sovereignty over food systems, in turn, is “one of the most basic yet profound ways in which we express Indigeneity” (D. Morrison, 2020, p. 21). Of course, the concept of community can also be co-opted in ways that serve settler colonial attempts to erase Indigenous peoples as nations. As numerous critical Indigenous scholars have underlined, settler attempts to include Indigenous peoples within the settler state can take many forms (Alfred & Corntassel, 2005; Byrd, 2011; Tuck & Yang, 2012), including the distortion of community to suggest that Indigenous peoples are simply communities among many other communities living underneath a multicultural state rather than sovereign nations with legitimate claims to land and self-determination.

We underline the importance for food movements to engage with critical social theorizations of the idea of community. At the same time, we caution against a singular understanding of community as co-opted, as this leaves little space to investigate existing alternatives, including those grounded in Indigenous epistemologies and “epistemologies of the

¹² This is particularly important in a context where “the study of Indigenous peoples was largely the knowledge/power domain of non-Indigenous scholars” (Moreton-Robinson, 2016, p. 3).

¹³ Moreton-Robinson (2016) uses “the term ‘First World’ not as a definitive concept but one that positions Canada, Guam, Australia, New Zealand, and Hawai’i, particularly since the Cold War, as being politically and culturally aligned within a global community with dominant white wealthy industrial capitalist countries such as Britain and the United States” (pp. 3-4).

South” (de Sousa Santos, 2014). The material and knowledge effects of foregrounding capitalist practice over all else (and it does seek to exert that hegemony) include de-legitimizing other possibilities and closing off options for transformative action. Meanwhile, Indigenous commentators like The Red Nation emphasize that “the caretaking economy is already in place [as an alternative to colonialism and capitalism].... Indigenous peoples and local communities who have distinct cultural and social ties to ancestral homelands and bioregions still caretake at least a quarter of the world’s land” (The Red Nation, 2021, p. 24). Precisely by attending to these other practices and ways of knowing, we make way for the liberatory and the transformative, for “the principles of freedom and integrity in how we seek to live as good people of the earth” (Red Nation, 2021, p. 149; see also Gibson-Graham & Dombroski, 2020).

Marxist critique of the capitalist state

We believe a key part of re-politicizing food movements must involve understanding the state as both an important source of the problem and an important arena through which food systems inequities can be addressed (see also Barbosa Jr. & Coca, 2022, this issue). One important theoretical inspiration, rooted in neo-Marxist critical state theory (Brenner et al., 2003; Gramsci, 1948/2011; Jessop, 1990, 2002, 2007b; Poulantzas, 1978), understands the capitalist state as an arena of complex, multi-scalar, strategic relations between political, economic, and social spheres, as both institutionalized materiality and, following Poulantzas (1978), a condensation of power relations within society. In seeking to ensure the smooth operation of capitalist society and the continued existence of capitalism, the state rests, as Gramsci (1948/2011) put it, both on coercion and consent, on force and cultural hegemony in its constant attempts to stabilize and maintain power and order in each historic-geographic constellation.

A shift of societal power relations occurs incrementally over time (through counter-hegemony in what Gramsci (1948/2011) termed a “war of position”) as well as in moments of upheaval and crisis. Bringing about change towards progressive social transformation will necessarily involve confrontational politics against corporate capitalism and the neoliberal state in the form of militant protests, contestations, and blockades (“shutting things down”) as well as grassroots organizing and creating alternative practices. Some scholars argue that change also requires engaging with the “state as a possible terrain of social transformation” (Routledge et al., 2018, p. 84).

The point is that societal relations, although path-dependent and materialized in institutions like the legal or education system, are never fully pre-determined. Rather, they are “shaped and reshaped by actors in both state and society [which can] reinforce reform agendas and alter degrees of autonomy and capacity” (McKay et al., 2014, p. 1180), through the “entangled relations between a radical civil society, the economy, and the state in an ongoing struggle for hegemony” (Routledge et al., 2018, p. 84).

While the state has enabled many of the very policies and structures that food sovereignty movements seek to dismantle, from land grabs to free trade agreements, and thus needs to be

contested, policies that support food sovereignty will necessarily entail some form of state involvement. These include, for example, “protection against dumping, trade, and speculation in agriculture; supply management; floor prices; marketing boards; agrarian reform; farmer-owned food inventories; hoarding controls; a moratorium on agrofuels; a shift to agroecology; and state-directed food provisioning” (McKay et al., 2014, p. 1179; cf. also McMichael, 2014; Shattuck et al., 2015). For a discussion food sovereignty and the integral state, following Gramsci, see Dale, 2021. Overall, as McCarthy reminds us, the rejection of the state and the privileging of communities as the most appropriate site for the organization of social reproduction—for example within the commons movement, but also within some food movements—bears an uncanny resemblance to neoliberal ideologies they claim to reject (McCarthy, 2009, pp. 511–512; 2005; see also Blackmar, 2006). There might be other solutions to rampant neoliberalism, for example by radically rethinking and democratizing public ownership (for example see Cumbers, 2012; Routledge et al., 2018)—and we encourage food movements to further explore these options. All this not only demands a critical understanding and conception of the role of the state, it also opens up the possibility to act and engage with and beyond the state in historically and geographically specific ways, towards generating and supporting more just food futures. As Routledge et al. (2019) conclude, “another state is *possible, necessary, and insufficient* for engendering just social formations” (p. 79, original emphasis).

Critical Indigenous Studies understandings of sovereignty and the state

A second inspiration for understanding and interacting with and beyond the state comes from Critical Indigenous Studies, their critique of settler-colonial nation-states, and theorizations of Indigenous sovereignty. While discussions about the settler-colonial state offer caution about movement co-optation and the ongoing entrenchment of colonial violence, conversations about Indigenous sovereignty offer potential for movements to think about how they can work in respectful relation to Indigenous governance and imagine governance systems other than through nation-states.

Critical Indigenous studies scholars argue that while strategic engagements with the state may be necessary in the short- and medium-term, decolonial futures demand the dismantling of settler states (Alfred, 1999; Coulthard, 2014; Manuel & Derrickson, 2015; Monture-Angus, 1999; L.B. Simpson, 2011; Maracle, 2003; Tuck & Yang, 2012). This dismantling is rooted in the recognition that settler states rely on the disappearance of Indigenous Nations to legitimize settler governments’ claims to sovereignty. For example, while both colonization and racialization are “concomitant global systems that secure white dominance through time, property, and notions of self,” the conflation of these terms is one way that settler states attempt to disappear Indigenous Nations by “framing them through discourses of racialization that can be redressed through further inclusion into the nation-state” (Byrd, 2011, p. xxiii).

To break down colonial violence perpetuated by settler states, critical Indigenous scholars argue it is necessary to regenerate Indigenous ways of being, by centering Indigenous laws,

sovereignties, and governance structures (L. B. Simpson, 2011). This includes Indigenous theories and praxis of sovereignty, which have been theorized as a responsibility to and relationships with land, water, air, and all beings, rather than the right to control land and others (Byrd, 2011; Monture-Angus, 1999; L.B. Simpson, 2011). Indigenous sovereignty is also described as place-based, occurring at multiple scales, and is rooted in Indigenous ways of being (A. Simpson, 2014; L. B. Simpson, 2011). L. B. Simpson (2011) explains that Anishinaabeg sovereignty begins “with how we treat ourselves and our family members” including human and non-human beings (p. 144).

Indigenous sovereignty is also understood as overlapping so that “one sovereignty can be embedded in another” (A. Simpson, 2014, p. 177). This highlights the ways that responsibilities for lands can be shared by multiple nations, as demonstrated through treaties such as Dish with One Spoon that “assumed that they [the Haudenosaunee and Nishnabeg] would share the territory, that they would both take care of their shared hunting grounds and that they would remain separate, sovereign, self-determining and independent nations” (L. B. Simpson, 2011, p. 114). These theorizations and praxes of sovereignty challenge western understandings of sovereignty that claim ultimate authority over peoples and territories.

In this context, A. Simpson (2014) argues that Indigenous assertions of nationhood and sovereignty “interrupt the sovereignty and the monocultural aspirations of nation-states” (pp. 21-22)—“monocultural aspirations” bringing us poetically back to food systems. A. Simpson (2014) points out that Indigenous assertions of sovereignty “remind nation-states such as the United States (and Canada) that they...possess a precarious assumption that their boundaries are permanent, uncontestable, and entrenched. They possess a precarious assumption about their own (just) origins. And by extension, they possess a precarious assumption about themselves” (p. 22). From here we might ask: What if food movements acted in relation to Indigenous sovereignties instead of the nation state? How might this change food movements orientations, strategies, and goals?

Engage with tensions productively

Tensions do not preclude collaboration. Instead of ignoring, shying away from, or attempting to erase tensions, we encourage food movements to engage with them, in respectful debate and discussions, openly, and in ways that are context specific. As tensions are also historically and geographically produced, it is important to understand relations with other places, scales, and times when addressing them. Engaging with tensions will look different depending on what the tensions are and what kinds of power relations are involved. In some instances, openly addressing and debating tensions may lead to new understandings of problems and new solutions, and/or realizations that while continuing to disagree, certain approaches or positions can still work together and support each other.

In other cases, recognizing and understanding tensions between approaches might reveal that there are “many overlaps that can’t be figured, that cannot be resolved” (Tuck & Yang, 2012, p. 31). This might mean that movement actors continue to disagree but find ways to collaborate on specific or strategic projects and campaigns. It might also mean that some groups and individuals continue building alliances despite (or even because of) discomfort, use uncommonality and difference as a start rather than end point, are okay with leaving certain questions unanswered, and/or understand when to step in and when to step back. Tuck and Yang (2012) argue that adopting this kind of “ethic of incommensurability” will help to “reduce the frustration of attempts at solidarity” while at the same time not letting “anyone off the hook” from the unsettling and difficult work of alliance building (p. 4).

Understanding tensions provides space for movements to engage with the ways they and their members are differently situated in historically, geographically, and scalar ways. Tensions can tell us things—uncover things, prompt different ways of thinking, and create different pathways for moving forward. For example, the often-noticeable tension between social and environmental goals elides the role of cheap food in the production of poverty. By allowing overproduction to bring down prices paid to farmers, food is made cheap to the working class, which allows industry to keep wages to workers low (see, e.g., Patel & Moore, 2017). We can avoid the pitfalls of cheap food by paying family farmers fairly for their products and paying workers wages that allow them to purchase sustainably produced food. Instead of starting from the assumption that we can either have cheap food or sustainably produced food, we need to ask questions about how we tear down oppressive structures and rebuild systems in which it is possible to do both.

Similarly, income-based and “good food”-approaches do not have to be mutually exclusive. On the contrary, although food insecurity within a capitalist economy is caused by insufficient income and the high cost of living, and thus fair wages and the welfare system need to be secured, it is also necessary to problematize the current food system. Beyond adequate income, access to good food for all requires a sustainable, safe, and high-quality food supply (Welsh & MacRae, 1998)—which the corporate food regime has been unable to provide. Phrased differently, we are wary of dichotomizing questions such as: do community food security initiatives reinforce root causes of hunger *or* are they a low threshold catalyst that uses the power of food to instigate larger changes? This question cannot be answered in the abstract but requires analysis of these projects and their contexts on several scales (see also Rosol, 2018). An interesting aspect about community food centres, for instance, is that they are not either/or, but have both potentials. What Ghose and Pettygrove write about grassroots community gardens is also true for community food initiatives: they can “simultaneously contest and reinforce local neoliberal policies” (Ghose & Pettygrove, 2014, p. 1092; Pérez Piñán & Vibert, 2019).

The history of social movements shows us that the prefigurative-versus-strategic tension also need not always be polarizing and, in some cases, may be dissolved altogether (e.g., Indigenous resurgence movements and the Student Non-Violent Organizing Committee of the 1960s). The daily enactment of Indigenous food practices, for example, embodying concepts of

Indigenous food sovereignty, directly challenges the colonial and capitalist food systems that occupy Indigenous lands. As L. B. Simpson (2011) explains, living as a contemporary Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg woman *is resistance*: her being and the survival of her community is evidence that colonial attempts to occupy, subjugate, and obliterate have not succeeded. Her being is a direct challenge to the colonial state. Similarly, Cornassel and Bryce (2012) discuss how Indigenous practices of traditional land and food system management enact Indigenous self-determination, resist colonial state authority, and demarcate Indigenous homelands. In this context, depending on one's positionality in relation to broader systems of oppression, the dichotomy between "fighting the power or being the change" can disappear. As with the other obstacles we address, a better understanding of the conceptual similarities and political differences between prefigurative and strategic approaches, and of their specific contributions towards achieving change, offers new opportunities for building alliances within food movements (Raekstad, 2018; Swain, 2019).

Tensions that revolve around fundamental disagreements over what long-term, just food futures look like, may demand an uncomfortable understanding of differences that cannot be reconciled in the present. For example, movement actors who argue that the state is a central actor necessary to facilitate just food futures, will likely need to understand the ways that their relationship with the state is fundamentally different from other groups—like Indigenous activists in settler colonial contexts such as Canada and the United States—who advocate for its (eventual) removal. This is not to say that these groups cannot work together on short-term strategic projects (that may even involve the state!), but rather that meaningful alliance building is likely to demand that both groups understand that they may not share common long-term methods or visions for reaching just food futures. Our call to engage with tensions is not a call to "resolve" these tensions but rather to understand them, their value in revealing our differences, and the ways they can equip us to move forward—while recognizing that we are all implicated in and impacted by different structures of oppression. Our call is to understand that struggles for system transformation are necessarily messy, and that different struggles are "not parallel, not shared equally, nor do they bring neat closure to the concerns of all involved" (Tuck & Yang, 2012, p. 31).

Role of Academics

We include a section reflecting on the role of academics because we believe that academics have a specific responsibility to support the creation of just food futures. In thinking through this responsibility, we point to the particular skills and tools that academics have to contribute to furthering the goals of critical food movements. For example, through research, teaching, and writing and based on critical analysis of literature and active engagement and observations of what is happening on the ground, academics can contribute to furthering knowledge and

awareness of the conditions that prevent or enable needed changes, highlight efforts that are already being made on the ground and from the bottom up, point out shortcomings, encourage critical reflection, and suggest ways forward.

Research in the spirit of critical solidarity can help make visible the ways in which movements may reproduce hegemonic relations of class, race, and gender, and in so doing contribute to the very inequities they seek to overcome. Critical solidarity—being critical, yet in solidarity—means being supportive while not shying away from critique. It can include pointing out shortcomings and providing accountability in terms of how achievements and processes adhere to internally set or external goals—something that can fall through the cracks in the routine of urgent daily demands under conditions of always insufficient resources.

Beyond offering potentially valuable outsider perspectives, many of the contributors to this Themed Section understand themselves as embedded researcher-activists. In this way academics might contribute to the creation of just food futures through the praxis of participatory action research and other forms of radical, community-based enquiry that reinforce the shared practice of *action—reflection—action*. Materially, academics can contribute resources obtained through grants and other funding sources not available to non-academics.

Of course, critiques must be offered with care, and with an awareness that some are better offered internally rather than publicly. Critiques must also be offered in recognition of the context and constraints in which food initiatives work. For example, it is important to understand that some food initiatives are responding to overwhelming exigencies in the here and now, and thus may be constrained in their ability to aim at broader structural change (see, e.g., Vaiou & Kalandides, 2015; Vibert et al., 2022, this issue.¹⁴ It is also necessary for academics to be critically reflexive of the long history of academic exploitation, in which academics have forwarded their own careers without attention to the violence caused to communities and grassroots movements by their research activities.

We believe critiques developed with care and in the spirit of collaboration and solidarity are constructive and necessary as we navigate our ways through difference. A careful multi-scalar analysis of the economic and political context in which projects act is, in our view, one of the main contributions of critical solidarity scholarship. Knowing and being aware of social, economic, and institutional contexts should help to address contradictions within daily practices, and ultimately help to transform current neoliberal, colonial, and white supremacist logics.

Overall, academics have the ability to provide resources, rationale, evidence, and capacity for powerful food advocacy—enhancing our collective ability to imagine and enact other worlds. We would like to see our own activities in the way Audrey Kobayashi (1994) described her research many years ago: “I do not use other people’s struggles as the basis for my research; I use my research as a basis for struggles of which I am a part” (p. 78).

¹⁴ Nonetheless, as Julie Guthman (2008) reminds us, the difficulty is that at times “organizations may go for the low-hanging fruit in their program goals, never reaching for the stuff that really needs picking” (p. 1245).

(Re)politicization across difference: Confrontation, creativity, and collaboration¹⁵

The corporate food regime established after WWII has been moving from food crisis to food crisis—and exacerbating energy, climate, health, and agrarian crises along the way—since the early 1970s. Whether the current transition can lead to a new food regime that is more just and sustainable will be determined by a wide range of struggles over food, resources, and political power in a period of late capitalism and accelerated environmental crisis. Nearly two decades ago, Lang and Heasman (2004) predicted “food wars between two possible futures: the ‘industrial life-science’ route based on individual consumption and ‘functional foods’ versus the ‘ecological public health’ route based on public policies” (Friedmann, 2017, p. 24). If food movements are to become decisive actors in the unfolding “food wars” they will need to continue to address the problems of hunger, malnutrition, environment, and equity on the ground, as well as become a powerful political force. One of the crucial factors will be a better understanding of the capitalist food system, its political resilience, and how to go about exploiting its specific vulnerabilities (and opportunities) in order to dismantle it.

More than that, the power of this movement depends critically on its ability to engage food inequities from an intersectional approach and, based on this approach, build alliances. Alliances are a key part of understanding, articulating, and realizing the food movement’s political potential. Alliances can take the form of short-term campaigns as well as long-term collaborations (e.g., between farmers and other food workers, between food activists and academics). Forming alliances does not mean negating differences or tensions. That we may not have a clear pathway or vision toward “food utopia” is not in and of itself the obstacle. It is highly likely that a multiplicity of post-capitalist food systems will be interactive and diverse. Metanarratives are being challenged by mosaics of understanding and *diálogos de saber* (dialogues of knowledge; see also Kerr et al., 2022, this issue) in many fields of social research and arenas of political action, most notably, food sovereignty, Indigenous knowledges, and agroecology (Martínez-Torres & Rosset, 2014).

Important for movement-building dialogues and strategies to “build the road as we travel” (R. Morrison, 1989) is the reconstruction of our public spheres. Rather than a neo-communitarian imagination of community or narrowly defined participation in policy work bounded by pre-set “rules of the game,” we see the public sphere as the space where grassroots democracy happens, and as the counterweight to the unregulated “free market” in which corporations with the most market power makes the decisions for society (Holt-Giménez, 2018). A half century of neoliberal privatization has decimated public goods and services and severely eroded the public sphere to make way for unfettered oligopoly capitalism and unregulated corporate market power. This has undermined both government and civil society at local, state, and national scales. The proliferation of farmers’ markets, community gardens, food hubs, food policy councils, and other food and agriculture organizations has helped re-establish germ cells

¹⁵ Here we draw on Routledge et al. (2018, p. 80).

of a renewed public sphere at local scales. To open spaces for pre-figurative work, and to reconstruct the public sector and re-establish public goods, the food movement will need to build a *transformational public sphere*.

We also contend that finding avenues for convergence between pre-figurative and strategic tendencies within food movement activism is a central issue for effective alliances, and for research. Attaining just food futures requires a particular kind of convergence and politicization; one that not only teaches and trains but launches powerful campaigns; one that not only builds niches for just food futures, but changes structures to ensure they become the norm; one that not only improves access to healthy food, but shuts things down (for example, through strikes) to show strength and support political demands; one that solidifies and builds the power of the oppressed; and one that clearly identifies and aligns with the broader visions for twenty-first century societal transformations. If food movements are to have a chance at changing the food system, they will not only have to advance viable alternatives on the ground, they must create the political will to “change the rules” favouring the destructive industrial practices of the current, corporate food regime (see also Habib, 2022, this issue).

Social theorist Nancy Fraser (1995) distinguishes between affirmative versus transformative remedies for injustices. By *affirmative* she means “remedies aimed at correcting inequitable outcomes of social arrangements without disturbing the underlying framework that generates them” (Fraser, 1995, p. 82). Going further, Fraser (1995) proposes *transformative* approaches “aimed at correcting inequitable outcomes precisely by restructuring the underlying generative framework” (p. 82), i.e., transforming the status quo. If food movements are to transition from a fragmented collection of movements “in themselves” to a powerful movement “for themselves,”¹⁶ they will need to reach above and beyond local projects and issue-focused politics, to envisage strategies for transformation not only of the food system, but of the larger systems of oppression in which food is embedded.

While we are not suggesting a single unifying framework of action, we contend that in order for food movements to create just food futures, a (re)politicization of these movements is necessary. This (re)politicization must be rooted in a commitment to ending oppression by dismantling dominant systems including capitalism, white supremacy, colonialism, and heteropatriarchy. This (re)politicization must be based in the understanding that working together requires accepting that everyone is complicit in systems of oppression (although in different and uneven ways), and that relationships are developed with an appreciation of difference rather than a call to fight one common cause or singular oppression (hooks, 1997; Fellows & Razack, 1998). (Re)politicization will thus look different depending on the organization, group, or movement. For example, groups dominated primarily by white people will need to politicize their relationship to whiteness (as well as other axes of oppression), whereas other groups may focus on politicizing their actions in relation to labour rights, gender-based violence, colonial land theft, and so on.

¹⁶ Playing on the distinction attributed to Karl Marx of “class in itself” vs. “class for itself” (Marx, 1847/1995).

Our aim in this Introduction and Themed Section is to offer some insights that can help food movements to better understand the contexts in which they work, how taken-for-granted concepts can be co-opted, and how/who might use these concepts in radical and transformative ways. In doing so, we hope to support a better understanding of one another, including how and why politics differ as well as how they might overlap and complement one another. Following sociologist Erik Olin Wright (2010), we see three broad strategies for social transformation (for more detail see also Klassen et al., 2022, this issue): 1) ruptural strategies (direct political confrontation); 2) interstitial strategies (creating alternatives and niches beyond the state); and 3) symbiotic strategies (collaboration with existing institutions, for example through policy interventions). Wright (2010) understands these strategies as complementary, supporting, and enabling each other.

We contend that to be successful, food movements should not eschew any of these—but make them work together in strategic alliances and collaboration across differences, geared towards truly transformative change. As bell hooks (1997) reminds us: forming relationships of solidarity demands dialogue without competition; it demands understanding that there are many routes to political consciousness, and that confrontation and discomfort are necessary for “any revolutionary change, any transformation, individually or collectively” (p. 499).

Acknowledgements: We thank Charlie Spring as well as the authors and participants of the three-day workshop for inspiring discussions that informed this editorial. We are also extremely grateful to Annie Shattuck, Ricardo Barbosa Jr., and Martha Stiegman for their valuable comments on earlier versions of this manuscript. This article, the workshop and the publication of the Themed Section was supported through the Canada Research Chair program of the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC) and a SSHRC Connection Grant (611-2020-0014).

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