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Editorial

"Confronting Anti-Black, Anti-Indigenous, and Anti-Asian Racisms in Food Systems in Canada."

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The impetus for this themed section came out of the broader reckoning that touched off in the summer of 2020 in the wake of the murder of George Floyd. The Canadian Association for Food Studies board, like so many organizations struggling to respond to such brazen violence, released a statement on racialized police violence and systemic racism. In the statement the CAFS board commits to more deliberately centering the work of anti-racism in our association—and this included two shorter-term projects. Curating and publishing an open access resource list on food and racism in so-called Canada, and publishing a themed section on racism in the food system. The CFP for the special issue was released the following May, 2021, and read in part "As we reckon with the ways white supremacy, capitalism, patriarchy and colonization has shaped food systems, we must also reflect on and redress dominant modes of thought and approaches that reproduce inequity within the academy (e.g., research and teaching) and society at large. As such, we welcome submissions that centre diverse ways of knowing and methods of knowledge production."

Over the past nearly two years, we (the special issue guest editor, Ama, and collaboration assistant, Michael) have met virtually many times to discuss the CFP, the process, the articles, and the broader backdrop of white supremacy, colonialism, and capitalism. And as we reflected on how we wanted to write this editorial, it occurred to us that our own approach to collaboration on this project has been *relational, conversational*. So, rather than writing a conventional editorial, we once again met virtually to reflect on some key themes that

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(re)emerged over the past couple of years. What follows is part of that conversation, edited for clarity and brevity. We hope this special issue contributes to keeping the conversations (and action) focused on structural change going.

Michael -Over the past couple of years that we've met to talk about all these issues, I wonder if you can reflect on the ways that the articles articulate and realize the commitments and values intended for this special section?

Ama - I have been pondering this question , more so around the response from CAFS. With the murder of George Floyd, there's been a lot of response from different organisations that are showing their commitment to tackling anti-Black racism, and their commitment to evaluating their policies and procedures. For me, around that particular time, it felt like 'here we go again', talking about anti-Black racism is very hot right now but there will be no follow-through and no follow-up. My identity as a Black person and as a Black woman is realized now but after that, all of it is going to be forgotten, in one way or another. Especially when the analysis does not include class. George Floyd was murdered not only because he was black but also because he was a poor black man.

When this special issue came about, my main thinking was around the question, how do we make sure that the voices of low-income Black and Indigenous people who are on the ground doing this work get centred? How do we centre the issues and the challenges as part of our ongoing dialogue, and ongoing conversations around food systems?

As I've said before, you cannot talk about food and food systems' work without talking about racial justice. They are all key pieces of this work, because of the fact that the stewards of this land in so-called Canada, are the Indigenous peoples who are still stewarding these lands and have for many, many generations. Also, we have to think about the folks that were brought here, through the Atlantic slave trade, whose bodies were exploited and who are also stewards of the land.

So, the backbone of our food system is really on the backs of these folks. In terms of this special issue, my piece was centred around how CAFS can really focus on embedding this in the long term, and I was happy to see that CAFS worked on a strategy. Of course, strategies can be tweaked, critiqued and made better over time and no system is ever perfect. But how do we really make sure that these voices from the community, from the folks most impacted, and from the folks who are doing the work, can be part of the dialogue and can also be seen as experts and knowledge holders in this work? At times, the experts come from academia who write fancy language, but how do we really make sure that the Indigenous field knowledge that is being brought to the table is also valued for its expertise and experience.

Michael - Based on the conversations that we had over the last two years, I'm thinking that, while this is a food journal, food didn't always come up. What is your opinion on why that is? You touched on it a bit, but maybe if you can just elaborate more.

Ama - I think it's because food issues are not always about food. The issues are very interlinked. I remember we touched on mental health and challenges of burnout. The number of requests that may come in for speaking engagements coupled with the lack of resources that are available to support this work, and the mental health pieces, are all associated with issues of food justice and food sovereignty. These issues don't exist in a vacuum as they are all very much interlinked. As I worked and learned, there is also the understanding

of the interconnectedness of all of these issues to each other and how they impact each other in many ways.

Michael - To some extent, the issue of interconnected barriers is reflected in many submissions we got, integrated barriers that systematically remove people from these spaces, as in, the journal spaces. We know that BIPOC people are systematically removed from academic spaces of all disciplines before they even have an opportunity to publish in the first place. As we commit to addressing these issues more substantively going forward, what might a journal that removes those barriers look like?

Ama - A key piece to flag is that we were doing this work in the middle of a pandemic. People's anxiety, depression, and worries were at an all-time high and people were literally trying to survive physically and mentally. I remember some folks wanted to submit an article but it was very difficult for them to even pull it together in the timeline given.

The other piece is around the journal format. Who are we trying to reach? What measures are we taking to reach them where they're at? What resources are available to make sure that we're reaching these people? What support systems are there to support folks in the writing process? What counts as 'academic' writing, and how can we support expanding what is taken seriously as 'scholarship'?

For example, I come from a background of oral storytelling. My people pass on knowledge and history to each other through oral storytelling—we value oral storytelling as expert knowledge and as a centrally important way that knowledge is transferred. What other ways can knowledge, from all these amazing folks doing work, be supported and be shared? Is writing journals, essays, or articles the only way to do it?

Michael - This is great advice for the journal and for the association. I have a couple more things that follow up on this to some extent. We all have different positionalities in the context of academic institutions. What would you say if there's a tenured faculty member reading this special issue? What would you say to them in terms of the ways they can start making the kinds of systemic change that you're talking about?

Ama - It's constantly pushing back on the current systems within these institutions. I remember when I was a first-year student, you get into class, and you're given these books, you realize very quickly that there's a particular language, the academic language. There's a particular way that people talk and use words, and it's quite easy for you to develop impostor syndrome. You feel like an imposter within these spaces. A friend of mine once pointed out that what happens on the ground actually informs academia. Academia writes about the work that the community is doing. It doesn't mean academia is directing what happens in life, it just documents what's happening on the ground and in life.

It is very important for professors to not necessarily think about how to make room for Black students, or how to make room for Indigenous students. It's about how do I create an inclusive school environment that supports everyone's needs, that supports different ways of sharing knowledge? An environment that also values diverse knowledge. We mark students on their grammar, on how well they've been able to articulate, and put all these fancy words and things together. But what is the substance of that work? What is the understanding of the issues that they are actually trying to pull together? And what systems are you putting in place? That in itself is not on just one professor. What systems exist within that institution to support these students in order to do their best work? I think those are all important considerations to think about. We can

never reform a broken system. We must dream of a world and be bold enough to try it.

Michael - Initially I wanted to ask, what would you say to a young, racialized student who's reading this, however, I want to reframe that because you just talked about your experience as a first-year undergrad. What would you tell yourself about this special issue or just about academia in general? Given where you are now, you've got your master's degree and you've been a long-time activist, and you're a leader in this space, what would you tell your younger self and how would you introduce this work to your younger self?

Ama -
This is not the only space or format to share knowledge. We can craft our own path.

If my younger self was looking at this issue, she would realize that it's possible. That the knowledge, the experience, and the skill set that I bring is also valued. I think it's very easy to look at this as "Oh, I could never do that." Or think that the knowledge and the experience that I have is something no one wants to hear. What I have to say is not important. But it is and I think we all have very important contributions to make.

Sadly, we live in a society where some folks are considered experts, and others are not. We need to really think about what we mean by "expertise", and where do these types of terminologies come from? Because if you look at a lot of Indigenous communities globally, the word expert is not what they use to describe knowledge holders within their community. We need to recognize Indigenous knowledge and Indigenous ways of sharing and transferring knowledge.

Michael - Is there anything else that you want to add?

Ama - I've met a lot of really amazing professors who are bending the rules to support their students, to help them navigate the bureaucratic world of academia. They understand the issues, the institutions we're in, and find ways to really support folks.

What I would ask is, how can that one professor also support a systemic change? So that the professor bending the rules to support is not an exception, but a rule that the institution as a whole adopts. I think that the more these institutions can create an environment that allows for different ways of learning and different ways of knowledge sharing, the better I think it is for all of society.

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Leticia Ama Deawuo. Before joining SeedChange as executive director in 2021, Ama spent fifteen years as a leading activist for food sovereignty and food justice, and four years as the Executive Director of Black Creek Community Farm, where she worked towards greater food justice with the Toronto community of Jane-Finch. She was instrumental in the creation of a number of initiatives in Toronto, including Jane Finch On The Move, Jane Finch Action Against Poverty, Jane Finch Political Conversation Café, Black Creek Food Justice Network, and Mothers-In-Motion. Ama recently completed a Master's Degree at York University, looking at how decolonization, agroecology, and the expertise of women elders in small-scale farming communities can support much-needed shifts in the way we think of our relationships with each other and with other living beings.

Michael Classens is a white settler, cisgender man and Assistant Professor in the School of the Environment at University of Toronto. He is broadly interested in areas of social and environmental justice, with an emphasis on these dynamics within food systems. As a teacher, researcher, learner, and activist he is committed to connecting theory with practice, and scholarship with socio-ecological change. Michael lives in Toronto with his partner, three kids, and dog named Sue.