



Research Article

Exploring activist perspectives on Indigenous-settler solidarity in Toronto's food sovereignty movement

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Abstract

While settler food activists have increasingly taken up the framework of Indigenous food sovereignty in their work, they continue to define food systems on stolen lands. In this article, we explore whether and how food activists in Toronto are building solidarity with Indigenous peoples and movements in their work. Drawing on semi-structured interviews with food activists and content analysis of Toronto food organizations, we identify three main themes: (un)learning, relationship-building, and visioning for the future within systemic constraints. Our findings reveal that many settler food activists engage in (un)learning processes, building decolonizing relationships, and supporting greater Indigenous leadership at their organizations. However, participants' solidarity-building efforts remain in the minority among

food organizations more broadly, and there is significant work to be done to prioritize Indigenous struggles for land and sovereignty in food movement work. Further, NGO structure and function, corporatized and donor-centric funding models, and settler colonialism more broadly, significantly constrain the capacities of food organizations to align with Indigenous goals and visions. We argue that settler food activists have a responsibility to more deeply consider the role of food activism in upholding and challenging settler colonialism, to let go of settler claims to authority over food and knowledge systems on stolen lands, and to advocate for deeper systemic changes that redistribute power and resources to Indigenous peoples and Indigenous-led initiatives.

Keywords: Activism; food movements; Indigenous food sovereignty; settler colonialism; settler-Indigenous solidarity

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Résumé

Alors que les personnes militantes de l'alimentation issues de la colonisation adoptent de plus en plus le cadre de la souveraineté alimentaire autochtone dans leur travail, elles continuent à définir les systèmes alimentaires sur des terres volées. Dans cet article, nous cherchons à savoir si et comment les activistes de l'alimentation de Toronto construisent une solidarité avec les peuples et les mouvements autochtones dans leur travail. À partir d'entrevues semi-structurées avec des activistes de l'alimentation et d'une analyse de contenu d'organisations alimentaires de Toronto, nous identifions trois thèmes principaux : l'apprentissage (ou le désapprentissage), l'établissement de relations et la vision quant à l'avenir à l'intérieur de contraintes systémiques. Nos résultats révèlent que de nombreuses personnes militantes de l'alimentation issues de la colonisation s'engagent dans des processus de (dés)apprentissage, dans l'établissement de relations de décolonisation et dans l'appui à un plus grand leadership autochtone au sein de leurs organisations. Cependant, les efforts de solidarité des personnes

participantes restent minoritaires dans les organisations alimentaires en général, et il reste beaucoup à faire dans le mouvement alimentaire pour donner la priorité aux luttes autochtones pour la terre et la souveraineté. De plus, la structure et la fonction des ONG, les modèles de financement corporatistes et fondés sur les donateurs, ainsi que le colonialisme de peuplement en général limitent considérablement les capacités des organisations alimentaires à se mettre en phase avec les objectifs et les visions autochtones. Nous soutenons que les activistes de l'alimentation issus de la colonisation ont la responsabilité d'examiner plus profondément le rôle de l'activisme alimentaire dans le maintien et la remise en question du colonialisme de peuplement, de laisser tomber les prétentions coloniales d'autorité concernant l'alimentation et les systèmes de connaissance sur les terres volées, et de plaider pour des changements systémiques plus profonds qui redistribuent le pouvoir et les ressources aux peuples autochtones et aux projets menés par des personnes autochtones.

Introduction

Imagine corn, beans, and squash in a bowl of Three Sisters stew. Each spoonful, a dose of all the complex carbohydrates and amino acids needed to nourish the body, and a reminder of the longstanding symbiotic relationships between these plants and many Indigenous peoples across Turtle Island. Author one first learned about the Three Sisters at a community kitchen event run by Chef Johl Whiteduck Ringuette from NishDish, who led a group of undergraduate students in making a Three Sisters stew. While cooking together, Chef Johl

taught the group about the Three Sisters cultivation system and its importance to Anishinaabe peoples' food sovereignty—not only for growing traditional foods in a sustainable way, but also for restoring the highly nutritious Anishinaabe diets disrupted by colonialism. As a white settler student interested in the international food sovereignty movement, Author one wondered why there was so little discussion—both in her classes and in food activist spaces she had been in—surrounding what it means to seek food justice or “sovereignty” over food

systems in a settler colonial context. Learning about *Indigenous* food sovereignty from Chef Johl marked a transformative moment in shifting Author one's thinking around food activism and white settler complicity and responsibility.

Author one is a settler with Norwegian, Scottish, and Polish-Ashkenazi Jewish ancestry. Her ancestors on both sides came to the so-called United States through Ellis Island in the early 1900s seeking economic opportunity and safety from persecution as Jews on her father's side. This positionality has pushed her to think more deeply about her place on the lands she calls home, and her responsibilities and obligations to work to dismantle structures of oppression as a settler ally. Author two is a white settler of English, Austrian/German, and Acadian ancestry. Her research and activism aim to support collective efforts for environmental justice and wellbeing and greater settler solidarity for Indigenous sovereignty, justice, and self-determination.

In Canada, conversations around food system change have increasingly aligned with the food sovereignty framework through calls for communities to have greater autonomy and access to healthy, culturally appropriate, and sustainably produced foods. Here, we engage with “food sovereignty”¹ as a framework for the most current iteration of many food movements' aspirations, grounded in a rejection of the neoliberal capitalist food system and affirmation of diverse sustainable food practices (Martínez-Torres & Rosset, 2014; Akram-Lodhi, 2015). While the concept's “big tent” politics has been both celebrated (Patel, 2009, p. 666; McMichael, 2015) and criticized (Bernstein, 2014; Li, 2014), food sovereignty remains essential to many food activists'

visions for food system change, including participants in this project.

However, Indigenous and settler ally scholars have called into question settler food activists' claims to defining food systems on stolen Indigenous lands (Morrison, 2011; Coté, 2016; Daigle, 2017; Kepkiewicz, 2018; Bohunicky et al., 2021). This is problematic in a context where settler privileges to own and farm land are founded upon the dispossession, exploitation, and genocidal violence inflicted upon Indigenous peoples. After all, the settler colonial project took up a range of strategies and logics over space and time, but the weaponization of food remained an essential tool, from the theft, conversion, and destruction of lands that formed the basis of Indigenous food systems to state-sanctioned policies of starvation.² Today, settler colonial logics continue to create inequities in the food system, not only through policy restrictions on traditional hunting practices or development projects that enclose and degrade traditional territories, but also, in some ways, through the very food movements that seek food justice.

Until recently, discussions of how settler colonialism shapes and is reproduced through food movement practices have received scant attention in food movement literature. A small group of scholars exploring Indigenous-settler relations in food movements in Canada have raised concerns about the ways that settler-led food sovereignty movements can work to uphold settler colonialism by: advocating for state-led policy changes that further affirm settler state jurisdiction over Indigenous lands; focusing primarily on settler farmer dispossession of and “rights' to land; and failing to challenge private land ownership regimes, which

¹ We also see food sovereignty's intersectional approach and focus on “sovereignty” as helpful for encouraging dialogue surrounding Indigenous struggles for land, life, and sovereignty and settler responsibilities to support them.

² For resources on food as a tool of the Canadian colonial project, see *Lost Harvests* by Sarah Carter (1990), *Clearing the Plains* by James Daschuk (2013), and *Administering Colonial Science* by Ian Mosby (2013).

continue to be used to ‘legally’ justify the occupation of Indigenous lands” (Kepkiewicz & Dale, 2018, p. 986; Daigle, 2017; Rotz & Kepkiewicz, 2018; Bohunicky et al., 2021). Because of these issues, Indigenous and settler ally scholars have called upon settler food activists to reimagine approaches to food system change in ways that confront settler colonialism and support Indigenous struggles for land and sovereignty (Morrison, 2011; Daigle, 2017; Kepkiewicz, 2018; Bohunicky et al., 2021; Littlefield et al., 2024). As Bohunicky et al. (2021) remind us, “in a settler colonial context we must ask: access and redistribution for whom, protection from what, and control by who” (p. 142)? This study responds to scholars’ calls for more empirical work on how settler food activists in Canada address these questions.

This article explores whether and how food activists in Toronto work to build solidarity with Indigenous peoples. Based on semi-structured interviews with nine settler³ food activists in Toronto and content analysis of seventeen Toronto food organizations’ websites, we present the findings following three main themes that emerged from participants’ reflections: (un)learning, relationship-building, and visioning for the future within systemic constraints. Our research shows that many settler food activists are working towards solidarity with Indigenous peoples by engaging in (un)learning processes, building decolonizing relationships, and supporting greater Indigenous leadership at their

organizations. Meanwhile, our findings suggest that participants’ solidarity-building efforts remain in the minority among Toronto food organizations more broadly, and significant work is still needed to prioritize Indigenous struggles for land and sovereignty in food movement work. Participants highlighted the limited capacities of food organizations to fully align with Indigenous goals and visions due to NGO structure and function, corporatized and donor-centric funding models, and settler colonialism more broadly. One potential way forward is to build greater coordination between food movement actors across scales to resist problematic models and support more systemic shifts towards decolonization. Ultimately, settler food activists have a responsibility to consider more deeply the role of food activism in upholding and challenging settler colonialism, to let go of settler claims to authority over food and knowledge systems on stolen lands, and to advocate for deeper systemic changes that redistribute power and resources to Indigenous peoples and Indigenous-led initiatives. The following sections provide an overview of food sovereignty in the context of settler colonialism, our research methods, and a detailed discussion and analysis of our findings.

³ Following Phung (2011), Jafri (2012), and Dhmoon (2015), we understand “settler” to refer to a broad spectrum of differently-positioned peoples in Canada with varying degrees of privilege, complicity, and responsibility. Our use of this term is not to conflate all settlers as the same, but rather, to draw attention to the particular ways each one of us has come to this place as non-Indigenous peoples—experiences which are unique and also connected to intersecting systems of domination—and to encourage dialogue around our responsibilities to Indigenous peoples. This project involves a range of settler voices, including white settlers and People of Colour raised in so-called Canada and recent immigrants.

Food sovereignty in the settler colonial context

Examinations of food sovereignty as it relates to settler colonialism and Indigenous struggles for self-determination have largely remained “an afterthought” in the broader food sovereignty literature (Martens et al., 2016, p. 21), though this field has expanded in recent years as scholars have called for greater engagement (Morrison, 2011; Coté, 2016; Daigle, 2017; Kepkiewicz, 2018). Central to these critiques is the call for greater interrogation of settler colonialism as the structural context in which food movements operate in Canada. Settler colonialism is distinct from other forms of colonialism, as there is no spatial separation of the metropole from the colony (Tuck & Yang, 2012). That said, important critiques of settler colonial theory have shown that the strong separation between settler and other forms of colonialism do not reflect the messiness, fluidity, or strategic variation of colonial realities across space and time, realities that may include logics of exploitation as well as elimination. Indeed, many cases, especially throughout Africa, do not fit neatly into either category of “settler” or “franchise” colonialism (Englert, 2020). Following Kelley (2017), Englert (2020, p. 1650) illustrates this messiness “in the case of enslaved African populations in the Americas, which are neither settlers afforded the right to exploit, appropriate and/or eliminate the Indigenous populations, nor part of the Indigenous population whose claim over the land is to be undone.” Kelley argues that sharp distinctions between exploitation or elimination prioritizes certain colonial formations; while ignoring the many contradictions it presents for others, namely those in Africa and colonized regions outside of the Anglo-Saxon world (Englert, 2020). Rather than placing a firm separation between different colonial formations, it is perhaps more useful to

consider the different strategies and relations that settler colonies have deployed, “which can include exploitation, elimination, or both. One strategy can morph into another through such processes as the development of new strategic necessities for the colonial powers, interactions with Indigenous resistance, or changing economic relations with the metropolis” (Englert, 2020, p. 1654). In this sense, Englert focuses on aims and goals of settler colonialism, as opposed to specific methods, which encourages analysis “of the multiplicity of settler strategies within an overall strategy of accumulation.” (2020, p. 1657) This point is crucial because it illustrates the ways that settler colonial formations can evolve alongside changing political economic conditions and spaces. In the case of the food movement in Canada, the geopolitical history and context of settler colonialism as well as neoliberal reform and the corporatization of nonprofits and charities are all pertinent to how current strategies unfold.

Access to and control over territory has been a key motive, but the exploitation of labour has also been a significant feature of settler accumulation at certain times, places, and within specific industries—including agriculture (Wolfe, 2006; Coulthard, 2014). Such settler colonial violence has continued and “shape-shifted” into new forms (Corntassel, 2012, p. 95) involving “force, fraud, and more recently, so-called ‘negotiations’”⁴ (Coulthard, 2014, p. 7). These strategies, Coulthard (2014) argues, make up the “politics of recognition” (p. 3), which advance state agendas of co-optation and assimilation with the aim of reproducing settler colonial state power over Indigenous lands, peoples, and sovereignty. While “decolonization” and “reconciliation” are increasingly

⁴ For example, title claims, resource development proposals, and self-government agreements.

taken up in settler state discourse, Tuck and Yang (2012) point out that these ideas become mere “diversions” and “half steps” without the repatriation of land—“all of the land”—to Indigenous communities, as true decolonization would entail (p. 7, 10).

In this context, Indigenous food sovereignties connect to larger struggles for self-determination. As Morrison (2011) explains, Indigenous food sovereignty is simply a new name for what has always been a “living reality” for Indigenous peoples through food practices that uphold their “long-standing responsibilities to nurture healthy relationships” with the earth (p. 97). Indigenous scholars Coté (2016), Daigle (2017), Whyte (2018), and Robin (2019) explore Indigenous food systems from Indigenous perspectives, underscoring the ways that Indigenous food sovereignties are pluralistic and differentially situated in communities’ own political and cultural traditions. Kyle Whyte (2018) underlines the intersectional nature of Indigenous food sovereignties which are intertwined with Indigenous societies’ “collective continuance” more broadly. Whyte (2018) describes this as the “adaptive capacity” of a society to sustain and reproduce itself, rooted in the deep relationships between human institutions and ecosystems (p. 7). As Nisqually leader Billy Frank Jr. explains, “without the salmon, there is no treaty right,” speaking to the ways that salmon conservation is inextricably connected to his community’s struggles for self-determination (as cited in Whyte, 2018, p. 4). In this way, Indigenous food sovereignties are grounded in the intersectionality between food, land, culture, and governance that make up Indigenous nationhood, impelling a deeper understanding of “food sovereignty” as embedded in the entirety of Indigenous lifeways.

These perspectives complicate settler activists’ claims to define food systems on stolen lands. Scholars problematize food sovereignty’s general focus on liberal

notions of rights and sovereignty, which center the nation-state and fail to recognize Indigenous peoples’ cultural responsibilities and relationships (Morrison, 2011; Corntassel, 2012; Coté, 2016; Daigle, 2017). As Daigle (2017) argues, Indigenous understandings of relationships with land, water, animals, and plants as non-human kin “complicate Euro-centric notions of sovereignty that are based on Lockean conceptions of land as property that can be enclosed, owned, and controlled” (p. 300). Outlining the struggles of the Algonquins of Barriere Lake against colonial incursion, Pasternak (2017) explains that Indigenous governance structures are based on responsibility to their relations, meaning that the “authority to have authority rests in ontologies of care” (p. 269; Coté, 2016). Such conceptualizations affirm the ways that “multiple sovereignties are lived every day according to a relational politics that is based on kinship relations and interdependent ecologies” (Daigle, 2017, p. 300). In sum, Indigenous food sovereignty is about much more than the familiar bundle of rights relating to food production and consumption, where a “right to define ‘agricultural policy’ is indistinguishable from a right to be Indigenous” and thus a right to fully realized and recognized sovereignty (Grey & Patel, 2015, p. 439; Hoover & Mihesuah, 2019).

Taking guidance from these insights, how can settler food activists act in solidarity with Indigenous peoples through their work? This is the primary question that guides this research. “Solidarity,” like “decolonization,” is a term that has often been overused, performative, and disconnected from real action (Tuck & Yang, 2012; Snelgrove et al., 2014). To counter this, scholars argue that settlers should see themselves as “sites of uncomfortable change” and deepen their (un)learning through self-reflexivity about positionalities, ongoing engagement with difference, and embracing difficult emotions or discomfort (Boudreau Morris, 2017, p.

469; Corntassel & Gaudry, 2014; Davis et al., 2017). However, there is a significant risk of self-reflection becoming self-indulgent when it re-centers settler feelings, emotions, and positionalities (Jafri, 2012; de Leeuw & Hunt, 2018; Gani & Khan, 2024). As Snelgrove et al. (2014) explain, considering questions of settlerhood and one's position on Indigenous lands—whether as an invited guest, visitor, trespasser, immigrant, or refugee—should aim to foster “a responsibility-based ethic of truth-telling to identify and act upon new pathways to Indigenous resurgence” (p. 4). Engaging with the difficult emotions that such truth-telling may inspire is also essential to prevent what Tuck and Yang (2012) call “settler moves to innocence,” where we avoid taking responsibility for our involvement in settler colonialism (p. 9).

Beyond self-education and reflexivity, scholars argue that Indigenous-settler solidarities must be grounded in actual practices and place-based relationships and approached as incommensurable but not incompatible (Tuck & Yang, 2012; Snelgrove et al., 2014; Kepkiewicz, 2018). Snelgrove et al. (2014) explain solidarity as a messy process of “ongoing feedback loops” of trust and accountability to one's relationships, both human and non-human (p. 19). Thus, solidarity-building is understood to occur at different scales, from self-education to community engagement, which aligns with Corntassel and Gaudry's (2014) pedagogy of “insurgent education” (p. 168). They argue that insurgent education is an important part of building solidarity with Indigenous resurgence movements through practices such as experiential education and restoration of Indigenous protocols and leadership that re-center Indigenous peoples and relationships and foster accountability for taking direct action to dismantle structures of oppression (Corntassel & Gaudry, 2014). In a context of ongoing settler colonial violence and climate change, Whyte (2020)

explains, it is essential that we work collectively to repair and establish kin relationships grounded in principles foundational to many Indigenous philosophical traditions including consent, trust, accountability, and reciprocity—something that food activist spaces may be particularly helpful in facilitating with their focus on land, community-building, and environmental health and justice.

For settler food activists to enter relationships of solidarity with Indigenous peoples, approaches to food system change ought to be reframed in ways that center Indigenous resurgence and self-determination as a “precondition” to food sovereignty in Canada at large (Kepkiewicz, 2018, p. 60). The extent to which these changes occur within food movements in Canada is unclear, but it appears that some shifts are underway. At the national level, the People's Food Policy Project (PFPP) involved consultation with the Indigenous Circle at Food Secure Canada, who developed a seventh pillar of food sovereignty in addition to six pillars developed at La Via Campesina's Nyéléni Forum in 2007: “food is sacred” and embedded in a web of human-environment relationships that must be respected (PFPP, 2011, p. 10; Kneen, 2011). However, as Kepkiewicz (2018) points out, the PFPP's (2011) final report remained focused primarily on settler food systems and government policy “without attention to the ways that settler systems and policy often inhibit many of the ideas discussed by the Indigenous Circle” (p. 18). More recently, Food Secure Canada has engaged in consultation processes with people involved in food movement work to develop a new food policy for 2030. Based on their reporting, it seems that Indigenous food systems are being prioritized in these preliminary discussions (Food Secure Canada, 2023).

In Ontario, the Yellowhead Institute has published a report on Indigenous food sovereignty and the challenges Indigenous communities face in accessing

resources, support, and funding for food-related initiatives. Drawing on interviews with Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples who have engaged with the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food, and Rural Affairs (OMAFRA), Robin, Rotz, and Xavier (2023) outline how proposals for Indigenous-led food and agricultural projects are frequently rejected or saddled with “inappropriate, unsuitable, and unattainable project revisions and timelines” by OMAFRA review committees (p. 10). Their findings reveal that exclusion, paternalism, and lack of understanding of Indigenous rights, knowledges, and experiences remain key issues within OMAFRA, leaving Indigenous peoples structurally excluded from decision-making and policy

development processes (Robin et al., 2023). In dialogue with this report, Kaitlin Rizzari (2023), of the Tkaronto Plant Life initiative, points out that OMAFRA does not include any “policy that protects, facilitates and encourages food growing, animal raising, and skill building for Indigenous and BIPOC farmers within cities,” effectively excluding many urban and Indigenous initiatives in Toronto that deviate from conventional agro-centric practices (para. 7). Although Indigenous food activists continue to carve out space for themselves amidst these challenges, there is evidently much work to be done to support Indigenous food sovereignties and unsettle settler-dominated movements for food system change (Littlefield et al., 2024).

Methods

The approach to this research was guided by Indigenous, feminist, and anti-colonial literatures that have pushed back against longstanding Eurocentric and heteropatriarchal biases, including false claims to objectivity and neutrality in research and views of the researcher as a rational authoritative expert (McDowell, 1992; Rose, 1993; Kovach, 2021; Tuhiwai Smith, 2021). We recognize the historical role that research has played in furthering the colonial project through the transplanting of academic institutions from Europe, mapping of “empty” lands, and circulation of “travellers’ tales” of the “Other” that reinforced damaging narratives of Indigenous people and affirmed imperialist discourses of discovery and settlement (Tuhiwai Smith, 2021, p. 8). Such colonial legacies and Eurocentric biases continue to define academia today through, for example, notions of individual intellectual property rights and the researcher/subject binary upheld in ethics reviews and peer-review processes (Gaudry, 2011; Stiegman & Castleden, 2015; Tuhiwai Smith, 2021). Following Adam Gaudry (2011), we seek

to support “insurgent” research by challenging the academy’s assumptions and amplifying Indigenous and other anti-colonial perspectives.

Two main principles underpin this research. First, we take guidance from Indigenous methodologies and aim to foreground “relational accountability,” which “implies that all parts of the research process are related, from inspiration to expiration, and that the researcher is not just responsible for nurturing and maintaining this relationship but is also accountable to ‘all your relations’” (Louis, 2007, p. 133; Wilson, 2008). This entails building relationships throughout and beyond the research, engaging in acts of learning and reciprocity, being accountable to the communities one is involved with, and pushing back on the extractivism that has historically defined Western research (Wilson, 2008; Kovach, 2021). In practice, this involved: conducting preliminary outreach to scholars and activists involved in food activist work in Toronto to incorporate their perspectives during initial research design; contributing time as a volunteer at two food

organizations; engaging in pre- and post-interview conversations; and providing compensation in the form of honorariums to participants. This has also involved longer-term learning and practice to create and support native habitat, food, and pollinator spaces in our communities, as well as ongoing Indigenous solidarity and land defense organizing. With all of this said, we recognize that relational accountability is a methodological ideal that cannot be fulfilled in one project, but rather, is a lifelong commitment.

Second, self-reflexivity informed the project's methodology, from the research design to data collection. Feminist scholars have discussed the importance of critical reflection on one's positionality to situate oneself within the larger power relations that shape research and knowledge production and be transparent about one's biases and subjectivity—an always incomplete yet generative process for understanding our relationships and responsibilities (Rose, 1997; McDowell, 1992; Moss, 2000). During volunteer sessions, preliminary outreach, and during interviews, reflexive discussions occurred regularly between Author one and other settler food activists. The informality of many of these conversations enabled an open space for what Kohl & McCutcheon (2014) call "kitchen table reflexivity" (p. 3) for participants to engage with discomfort and unpack their positionalities in relation to structures of power—which seems important to building relationships and creating space for more critical conversations in the future.

Through ongoing critical reflection and informal discussions, the idea arose to reverse the gaze and focus on settler food activists of diverse backgrounds. This choice was informed by the methodologies of Kepkiewicz (2018) and Bohunicky et al. (2021), whose work this project aims to build upon at the city scale, as well as anthropologist Laura Nader's call to "study up" and return the gaze to the "culture of power rather than the culture of the powerless" (as cited in Tallbear, 2014, p. 4). While this statement reflects an oversimplified binary, it resonates with our view that white settlers (including ourselves) have a responsibility to address structures of oppression which they benefit from and are complicit in. As Kepkiewicz (2018) argues, reversing the gaze in the context of food activism is not as straightforward as studying "up," but rather occurs "within or across" diverse food activist communities, where individuals are differently situated along varied axes of power (p. 35)—a point that becomes particularly important in an urban context like Toronto. This project aims to focus on settler food activists to explore how peoples with diverse positionalities understand their role in supporting Indigenous struggles for sovereignty.⁵

Author one conducted semi-structured interviews with nine non-Indigenous food activists in Toronto. Participants were recruited using a purposive snowball sampling method and included seven staff members and two volunteers at two Toronto food organizations.⁶ Although the project aims to reverse the gaze by

⁵ We recognize that there is a risk in centering settler voices by not including Indigenous voices in this project. The choice to reverse the gaze and focus on settlers was informed by preliminary conversations with activists and scholars involved in Toronto's food activist community which shaped the research design. These activists and scholars urged Author one to reach out primarily to settler activists in an effort to prevent further labour being placed on Indigenous people to educate settlers on their responsibilities to Indigenous peoples, as there are many resources that settlers can access to deepen their (un)learning, such as the sources engaged with in this project.

⁶ The choice to focus on food organizations in Toronto was primarily logistical, as this provided an avenue for establishing contact with people involved in food movement work. We also acknowledge that the focus on "food" organizations may be inherently colonial, as it implies a separation of food from other facets of life, which contrasts with many Indigenous cultures' view of food as inextricable from the whole of Indigenous cultures (Morrison, 2011; Settee & Shukla, 2020). Through this research, we have become aware of some Indigenous organizations that may not have an explicit "food" focus but are

focusing primarily on settler food activists, it was also important to reach out to Indigenous food activists in hopes of including their perspectives. However, time constraints on the research and the intense workloads of Indigenous activists who we were in contact with prevented this from being possible. As some participants explained, their Indigenous colleagues were stretched-thin and managing numerous roles and projects, including leading Indigenous-centered programming at their organizations. While interviews were the primary data source, a content analysis of seventeen Toronto food organizations' (sixteen settler-led, one Indigenous-led) websites was also conducted for context.

Interviews were transcribed and coded thematically using NVivo. Following participants' reflections on

Findings

(Un)learning towards solidarity

Participants highlighted settler education as a key component of building solidarity with Indigenous peoples in food activist spaces. Most participants underlined the need for settlers to take responsibility for educating themselves to prevent placing further labour on Indigenous peoples and to approach relationships in respectful and informed ways. This is not to say that participants saw settler education as occurring only at an individual level; rather, they articulated (un)learning as both an internal journey and a collective process that occurs through the building of community relationships. Many viewed education as a first step for settlers, but also stressed that, in the words of one self-

Indigenous-settler solidarity-building, the three main themes that structure the following sections ((un)learning, relationship-building, visions for the future within systemic constraints) loosely follow a scalar progression from micro to macro, yet, in reality, we do not understand these processes to fall so neatly into these boundaries. Rather, we see these processes as informing one another across scales in non-linear ways. While many participants expressed that one area (i.e., relationship-building in food activist communities) remained their primary focus, they also underlined that solidarity-building cannot occur in isolation and ultimately requires action and collaboration across scales.

identified Black settler, "there's no wiping our hands of it. It's ongoing and it's forever."

Some participants discussed efforts at their organizations to engage in uncomfortable conversations about settler colonialism, reconciliation, and settler positionalities to facilitate settler (un)learning. The participant mentioned above explained how team meetings have increasingly centered on critical conversations which "have gotten super uncomfy." Most participants viewed this discomfort as an important emotion for settlers to sit with. One newcomer activist expressed their "fear of making mistakes and fear of doing the wrong thing or saying the wrong thing," making the process "of engaging with these [topics] stressful"—a common challenge among

nonetheless engaged in resurgent food struggles alongside other types of programming. We are intentionally not naming them here, as such information could identify participants who work in partnership with some of these organizations. However, we want to emphasize that Indigenous activists and organizations are undoubtedly an active part of Toronto's food movement.

settlers in learning about and acknowledging their complicity in settler colonialism. As one Black activist discussed, settlers' own egos and fear can prevent more transformative conversations, as it is difficult "to hold words that feel scary to us." Echoing other participants' reflections, they maintained that for some participants "'settler' isn't a great word, but it's also a truthful word and if we acknowledge things, then we can grow from it."

Unpacking one's positionality was highlighted by most participants as essential to deepening their (un)learning around settler complicities and responsibilities. Consistent with dialogues in scholarship exploring settlerhood (Phung, 2011; Jafri, 2012), many participants discussed settlerhood as a spectrum and underlined the difficulty of articulating what it means to be a "settler," especially in Toronto where many people identify primarily with terms such as "immigrant," "newcomer," or "refugee." One Black activist reflected on this complexity as a descendant of enslaved African people: "For myself, [settler] is not something I identify as.... I don't come from... Well, ironically, my people are part of European colonization here and that history of settlerism, settling here. But we are stolen people brought to work on stolen land."

Another activist self-identified as a refugee, highlighting the complexity of settlerhood for people who carry experiences of displacement: "A lot of us, in modern times, are scattered across the planet... We had a civil war which resulted in a lot of people being displaced. So, I think I would consider myself a settler of sorts here on Turtle Island, but my political relationship to settler colonialism feels different."

Others echoed this point, with one person explaining their position as a child of immigrants from an African country as being interconnected with "colonialism" and other forces "that made it so people felt like they had to come to the West for a 'good life.'"

Throughout these reflections on positionality, some participants underlined that settler experiences of oppression—themselves varied and intersectional—should not be equated with those of Indigenous peoples. As one Black settler reflected, "Even though I didn't grow up on the land my family is from, I don't feel lost. I can speak the language, my name literally is that, I feel such a deep connection... My mom gave me a book of how [our] people came to be. And that is knowledge that many Indigenous people on this land do not get."

The refugee activist mentioned above also highlighted the challenge of acknowledging settler privileges and complicities within communities carrying political trauma: "A lot of our parents come here and their focus is like: get a job, get a house, stay stable. And [they] don't even want to be politically active because they hold a lot of trauma when it comes to political activism... It's like: 'I - just - want - to - settle.' And therein lies the issue... Whose land are you settling on?"

Considering that immigration processes are facilitated by the settler state, another participant said their position as a South Asian immigrant-settler makes them complicit in upholding settler colonialism. While it was clear that some participants were thinking deeply about complicity, only about half directly addressed this.

Many participants highlighted these (un)learning processes surrounding positionality as helpful for building mutual understanding of the intersectionality between systems of power. As a "stolen person on stolen land," one Black activist said, "there's a shared history of that oppression in the land" which they use as a basis for building solidarity with Indigenous peoples in their work. For refugees, another activist noted, "once you learn the history, it's pretty easy to be like, 'okay, well I'm actually very familiar with this history.... That's what happened to my people in my country.'"

One immigrant settler underlined that all peoples, including white settlers, have experienced disconnection from relationships to land through colonial capitalist forces and, even as we may benefit in certain ways and to varied degrees, these systems ultimately harm us all.

In their reflections on settler education, many participants expressed how engaging with Indigenous knowledges⁷ has been essential to their (un)learning. Some participants highlighted how learning from Indigenous knowledges has encouraged them to question views of land as a “resource” or something to be “owned” and, instead, prioritize values such as reciprocity and caretaking in their relationships to others and the land. One Black settler also reflected on how they have come to question Western biases after realizing that the agroecological practices that inform their work are rooted in the traditional knowledges and activism of Black, Indigenous, and People of Colour (BIPOC) communities. Speaking about regenerative agriculture, they reflected: “This is Indigenous knowledge and something that has been run by Black and Brown people. [Urban agriculture] was literally born in the ‘70s in New York by Black women.... Practices and knowledge that are framed today as “permaculture” are actually just Indigenous knowledge...that up until this time wasn’t seen as valuable [by western knowledge and science].”

Another participant, however, expressed that learning from Indigenous knowledges was not a focus of their work. As a white settler farmer, they reflected, they were “inspired by the Three Sisters” cultivation system but admitted that they tend to “follow more contemporary sources, often white men.” This participants’ minimal engagement with Indigenous perspectives—and the problematic undertones of their characterization of Indigenous perspectives as non-“contemporary”—differs from most participants in this project, yet this does not imply that their viewpoint is uncommon among food activists in Toronto more generally.

Overall, most participants in this project underlined the importance of learning from Indigenous perspectives to address settler biases and rethink their relationships to land. One Black activist reflected on the transformative (un)learning they have experienced by “building intimacy with the land” in their work and learning from Indigenous ecological knowledges. They explained their memories of “the ways that the land opened up once I started recognizing these plants...that hold medicine, that have been here for centuries and have grown alongside the people.” Some of these plants, they learned, include non-Indigenous plants that have become naturalized and cultivated for the medicines they have to offer. They reflected on Kimmerer’s⁸ discussion of the plantain plant in *Braiding Sweetgrass*

⁷ While we refer broadly to “Indigenous knowledges” here, we want to underline the plurality of the many Indigenous cultures across Turtle Island, who each have distinct languages, traditions, governance systems, and ways of knowing (ICFSC, 2010). As Battiste and Henderson (2000) explain, while there is no uniform definition for Indigenous knowledge, “the closest one can get to describing unity in Indigenous knowledge is that knowledge is the expression of the vibrant relationships between people, their ecosystems, and other living beings and spirits that share their land” (p. 42; McGregor, 2004; Morrison, 2011). We utilize this broader term to refer to the convergences between Indigenous worldviews surrounding relationality and interdependencies between all life, which contrast to Western philosophy, which views the world through Cartesian dualisms that separate (among other things) humans from nature, the latter of which is to be “managed” and “controlled” (Morrison, 2011; Tuhiwai Smith, 2021).

⁸ We recognize that there have been critiques of books like *Braiding Sweetgrass* for over-generalizing Indigenous worldviews. As Métis scholar Zoe Todd (2021) tweeted, *Braiding Sweetgrass* falls into “a canon of ‘Indigenous eco’ scholarship written largely for white audiences that erases the decolonial/decolonization struggles and scholarship of folks in the Global South...erases Black Studies and doesn’t attend to capital/empire.” Piuma and Conklin Akbari (2021) see *Braiding Sweetgrass* as a “gentle” book of personal narrative that provides an entry point into Indigenous scholarship but

which “changed [their] whole heart” and helped them think through their responsibilities as a first-generation Black settler: “This plant came from Europe and wasn’t Indigenous but became naturalized to here. Kimmerer spoke about people who come here and feel like it’s a stepping stone between their home and where they need to be. That part really hit me. I was like: yeah, for people that this isn’t ‘home’ to, is there still that reverence?... When I think of land I have to think of here. My mind can’t go to [my home country]. Even though I love the land there, that’s not where I was raised. That’s not my lived reality.”

Learning from the lessons of the plantain plant, they concluded, “how do settlers that have not been here for generations, who immigrated over, make peace as well? How do we start to grow relations [and] be here in wellness?”

Relationship-building in the organizational context

Many participants underlined relationships as central to their visions of food system change, echoing both food sovereignty and critical Indigenous literatures (Morrison, 2011; Corntassel, 2012; Martínez-Torres & Rosset, 2014). Participants discussed efforts at their organization to build relationships with Indigenous peoples including: sharing lease and land space; providing access to kitchens, event spaces, and greenhouses; and supporting and participating in Indigenous-centered/led programming. Some organizations have also established formal partnerships with Indigenous organizations, who lead various events

around Indigenous food and culture, such as seasonal ceremonies led by Anishinaabe elders and traditional food workshops. For example, one participant discussed a maple syrup day led by their Indigenous partners which was “completely Indigenous knowledge” and a “pivotal” learning moment for many community members about the Indigenous origins of a food that has been co-opted as “Canadian.” Another participant discussed their role as an assistant coordinator in an Indigenous garden program for people transitioning out of incarceration, where they provide support to Indigenous program leaders with their skillset in horticultural education and therapy. Some activists also discussed how designated spaces for Indigenous community members had been established at their organizations, such as Indigenous medicine gardens and ceremonial structures, which they saw as important for supporting Indigenous resurgence and healing, while facilitating Indigenous-settler dialogue. As one Black activist reflected, having the “physical space of Indigenous presence on the land” was important to moving beyond “theory and land acknowledgements” towards enacting solidarity in place.

While settler food activists in the city are finding ways to “pass the mic” to Indigenous peoples and step back into more supporting roles, such steps are not straightforward. As one immigrant settler reflected, relationships should be a “central focus” of food activism, “but that is difficult in practice because of the systems that we work in [which] have actively tried to destroy those relationships, not only within Indigenous communities, but also between settlers and Indigenous communities.... The complexity is that we live in a

warn readers not to lose sight of the unsettling and uncomfortable parts – such as the ways we are complicit in settler colonialism – which are “easy to not pay attention to if you don’t want to” (15:18). Books like Kimmerer’s (2013) may help us reflect more deeply on our relationships and responsibilities to others and the earth, but there is more work to be done to consider how settlers can (un)learn in ways that attend to the specificity of the places we live (e.g. whose lands we live on; what nations we are accountable to; what treaty agreements we are subject to).

system that does not exist in “right” relationship to most things.”

Some participants reflected on the messiness of building relationships with Indigenous peoples while working within NGO structures and settler colonial systems more broadly. The participant above highlighted the “uncomfortable dynamic” of operating on Indigenous land and paying Indigenous people to come “facilitate their teachings on this land, which technically they should have access to anyway.” Another immigrant activist shared that they felt “more guilty” since getting involved in this work, because they have “ventured in and made more mistakes”—a feeling compounded by trying to “decolonize” while seeing their work as colonizing, too: “When we are farming, we are taking land and we’re taking from it. And then in our work with Indigenous partners, a lot of our structures can be an imposition of colonialism—whether it’s financial requirements or policies and procedures of the workplace.”

One immigrant activist echoed this, highlighting how organizations’ standard practices may not always be compatible with Indigenous approaches, although there is now “documentation being built up” among food organizations surrounding Indigenous “protocols, how to approach an Indigenous person, when to offer tobacco [etc.].” Despite these efforts, this participant expressed dismay that the busyness of their job ultimately prevents them from being able “to consistently support” their Indigenous partners to the degree they would like to, making that relationship one that remains “on the periphery” on an event-by-event basis. Within these collaborations, they concluded, “there are going to be communication breakdowns where you have to actively work in that relationship to be able to then overcome those misunderstandings, barriers, hurts, [and] grief.”

Although participants’ responses indicate that Toronto food activists are beginning to build meaningful relationships with Indigenous peoples through their work and confront the associated challenges, our content analysis of seventeen food organizations’ websites is less conclusive. Six out of the seventeen organizations made no mention of topics related to Indigenous perspectives, Indigenous-led initiatives, land acknowledgements, decolonization, or reconciliation, and seven engaged minimally with these topics (between one to four mentions across all webpages). Only four organizations’ websites had five or more mentions, with three organizations highlighting Indigenous-centered initiatives. Among the five websites with land acknowledgements, only two included commitments to taking action to support Indigenous struggles. Notably, in a field where land is an inherent focus, none of these organizations’ websites included discussions around Indigenous jurisdiction, land restitution, or what it means to operate on stolen Indigenous lands.

Navigating settler colonial systems: Limits of food organizations and visions for the future

Despite efforts to (un)learn and build relationships with Indigenous peoples, all participants expressed that food organizations are ultimately limited in their abilities to challenge settler colonialism and support Indigenous struggles due to corporatized and donor-centric funding models, conflicting budget priorities and budget constraints, and settler colonialism more broadly. Many participants described settler colonialism as manifesting at various scales, both within organizations and across the larger political economic system within which organizations work.

Dependency on funding was seen as a significant barrier to gaining greater control over organizational

programming and directing it towards solidarity-building efforts. As one immigrant settler expressed, applications for funding typically means “writing down what the grantor wants,” which can result in a “disconnect unless there are specific grants” for things that organizations want to do or are needed for their communities. Another refugee activist highlighted the risks of getting caught up in the funding cycle by spending money on frivolous things like “tents or stickers” for fundraising events or other kinds of “hoopla,” rather than being directed primarily at programming for their community. This also means that certain food initiatives get prioritized over others according to what agricultural activities funders see as legitimate. Unless there is further funding for Indigenous-led initiatives, one immigrant settler activist reflected, “some gaps” will continue to exist in their organizations’ solidarity-building efforts as they are “still held back by a lot of rules and budget limitations.” Ultimately, one immigrant activist concluded, the funding model is “a colonizer system designed to control the flow of resources in a specific way that is not always beneficial to the people who live within a certain community.”

Moving through the dominant grant circuit, food organizations are also limited by constrained budgets and labour issues. One refugee participant explained that food organizations in Toronto tend to “rely on funding from Canada Summer Jobs [which] is forever feeding into this short-term precarious labour that young earth-workers are constantly being pushed into.” The effects of this were felt by their organization recently, as they found themselves “losing valuable staff because the funding ended [which] stalled the amazing work” their organization had done to support greater

inclusion of BIPOC youth. Many participants also underlined the ways that staff at food organizations are typically overburdened⁹ in the context of strained budgets and capitalist relations and, thus, are limited in their capacities to engage more meaningfully in solidarity-building efforts.

Two participants also underscored problematic forms of leadership that they saw as a pervasive problem for food activists seeking work. For one Latine activist, there was a “revolving door” of volunteers and staff at multiple community gardens they had worked at, due to undemocratic leadership by predominantly white settlers. A refugee activist echoed this, reflecting on the “push to bring in Black and Indigenous representation,” particularly following the Black Lives Matter protests in 2020. They argued that some food organizations’ efforts to “hire as many Black and Brown people as possible” were performative and, ultimately, problematic as they failed to do “any of the critical work to actually engage with these communities” and address racism in tangible ways.

Given these systemic issues, participants outlined their hopes for the future of food sovereignty in Canada and called for structural change away from capitalism and greater recognition of communities’ “rights” to determine and control their food systems, echoing food sovereignty scholarship (Patel, 2009; Martínez-Torres & Rosset, 2014). Some activists underlined the importance of food sovereignty in a society where, as one Black activist noted, “people have been denied choice for so long” and, as one white settler concurred, consumers are “at the whims” of companies like Loblaws. Conversations in Toronto have increasingly moved towards recognizing the “larger system behind this: capitalism” and the need for people to become

⁹ In some interviews for this project, these high demands on staff were evident. For example, one interview was interrupted 5 times within 35 minutes by colleagues, volunteers, and clients seeking the participant’s assistance—a period that was technically the participant’s lunch break.

“self-determining” when it comes to their food systems, one immigrant settler explained. “People’s right to live” is threatened, they concluded, “if they don’t have sovereignty over feeding themselves.”

Alongside these calls for communities in general to gain more “sovereignty” over their food systems, many participants also called for Indigenous struggles for sovereignty and self-determination to be foregrounded in food movements going forward. Along with Indigenous leadership, many participants expressed hopes for the returning of land to Indigenous peoples and saw this as a keystone of the food movement’s future, particularly in the face of the climate crisis. As one refugee activist reflected, “we are simply soothing ourselves by saying that we are “decolonizing” or “reconciling” if we are not doing work that is furthering the Land Back movement.” Others hoped “to see some policies changing around the way land is used,” as one white settler reflected, and called for Indigenous leaders to be at the “forefront” of these decision-making processes.

Meanwhile, not all participants understood Land Back in its literal sense to be essential. As one white

settler activist reflected, “Land Back isn’t the actual land. It’s reconciliation, decolonization. It is not undoing what was done. It is acknowledging what was done, communicating, being open, coming together, having the conversations, and shifting the systems.” This response reflects an abstraction of the idea of Land Back and some disjuncture in settler understandings of concepts like Land Back and decolonization. Indeed, one refugee activist expressed a rather different view: “I see a lot of people try to take ‘land back’ and make it abstract. And like, no! Actual land back. I hope for that to become an acceptable thing for the average person who lives on Turtle Island [where] it’s not this lofty political goal. It’s just something that we could see happen in our everyday reality.”

This participant also underscored that Land Back efforts can take many forms and outlined how they try “to further Land Back by seed-bombing native species and participating in the removal of invasive species.” As discussed previously, the creation of designated spaces for Indigenous community members could also be seen as efforts to return land to Indigenous community members in food movement spaces.

Discussion

The findings of this research show that many settler food activists in Toronto actively strive to think more deeply about their responsibilities to confront settler colonialism and support Indigenous sovereignty and self-determination through their work. Participants’ responses demonstrate an understanding of settler education as a crucial step towards transforming what

Davis et al. (2017) call “settler consciousness”¹⁰ and building solidarity with Indigenous peoples. While (un)learning is cyclical, lifelong, and always incomplete (Davis et al., 2017; Kluttz et al., 2020), participants echoed scholars who argue that settlers have a responsibility to self-educate to prevent placing further labour on Indigenous peoples and to build a

¹⁰ Davis et al. (2017) explain “settler consciousness” as being made up of “the narratives, practices and collective Canadian identity that are based solidly in a foundation of national historical myths...[which] pervade all institutions and all spheres of society” (p. 401).

foundation of mutual understanding so that decolonizing relationships may flourish (Morrison, 2011; Kepkiewicz, 2018).

Many participants reflected on the value of engaging with discomfort in their (un)learning—a key point highlighted throughout the literature on Indigenous-settler solidarity (Corntassel & Gaudry, 2014; Boudreau Morris, 2017; Davis et al., 2017; Bohunicky et al., 2021). As Corntassel and Gaudry (2014) argue, a “pedagogy of discomfort” can be a productive approach for motivating settlers to learn about colonial realities, “make amends and to be responsive to Indigenous struggles for decolonization” (p. 169). In discomforting acts of “truth-telling” (Corntassel & Gaudry, 2014), participants reflected on their positionalities as settlers who are differently positioned and implicated. Although only some participants discussed complicity, conversations are developing among Toronto food activists that move beyond self-reflection on one’s ancestry, towards unpacking the varying “degrees of penalty and privilege” that implicate us to confront intersecting systems of domination (Dhamoon, 2015, p. 30; Jafri, 2012). While discussions of settlerhood do little to dismantle colonialism if we remain solely focused on the “question of ‘who’ at the expense of the ‘how’” (Snelgrove et al., 2014, p. 22), participants’ responses demonstrate that unpacking one’s positionality can support (un)learning in transformative ways.

Along with positionality, most participants highlighted the importance of learning from Indigenous perspectives when reflecting on and countering settler biases and building better relationships with Indigenous peoples and the land. These reflections resonate with Morrison (2011), who argues that Indigenous knowledges are invaluable to

developing better food systems, as Indigenous peoples have sustained the land and their food systems for millennia in dynamic and adaptable ways. Such knowledges offer alternatives to the colonial-capitalist values that currently dominate the global food system. Additionally, our findings highlight the value of food activist spaces in providing a unique context for this learning to occur in connection to others and the land. While it is evident that there is room for settler education to go deeper—especially as this project likely over-represents those settlers who are engaging in deeper (un)learning, given their interest in participating in this project¹¹—our findings suggest that settler food activists in Toronto are making space for critical reflection surrounding settler roles and responsibilities in addressing settler colonialism and supporting Indigenous work and struggles.

Many participants highlighted efforts within their communities to build relationships with and center Indigenous peoples in their work such as sharing lease space with Indigenous partners, supporting and participating in Indigenous-led programming, and establishing designated spaces for Indigenous community members. Such efforts imply that some settler food activists are beginning to act upon their responsibilities to cede power to Indigenous peoples by “scrapping settler agendas, listening, stepping back, and supporting Indigenous leadership” (Kepkiewicz, 2018, p. 199). Some participants expressed how they have aimed to occupy more supporting roles, deferring to Indigenous leaders and trying to follow Indigenous protocols. As many scholars argue, Indigenous leadership is an integral part of supporting Indigenous resurgence, which is necessarily discomforting for settlers who may need to give up power that had been previously taken for granted (Tuck & Yang, 2012;

¹¹ It is worth noting that a few White settler activists declined or canceled interviews out of feeling “uncomfortable” speaking on these topics.

Corntassel & Gaudry, 2014; Kepkiewicz, 2018; Bohunicky et al., 2021). Overall, it seems that most participants are working to build place-based relationships and becoming more personally accountable to Indigenous peoples through their work—something Snelgrove et al. (2014) argue can help move solidarity from “performative” and “temporally driven” acts around highly publicized movements (e.g. Idle No More) towards being more spatially grounded and localized (p. 24).

At the same time, participants underscored the challenges of trying to build relationships within settler colonial systems, including corporatized funding models and NGO structures. Participants' spoke to the need to cultivate “ongoing feedback loops” of trust and accountability between settler and Indigenous peoples to navigate mistakes and missteps as they occur (Snelgrove et al., 2014). These reflections also highlight how building relationships in ways that fully align with Indigenous cultures is challenging and, perhaps, impossible when food organizations continue to operate within and through settler colonial structures. This connects to dialogues around solidarity-building as necessitating an “ethic of incommensurability,” which Tuck and Yang (2012) explain as the recognition that various social justice projects may not always be able to “speak to one another” or “be aligned or allied” (p. 28) and, ultimately, “decolonization will require a change in the order of the world” (p. 31). Recognizing these incommensurabilities, Snelgrove et al. (2014) argue, opens possibilities for finding “potential lines of affinity” between decolonization and other struggles, which can only be sustained through place-based relationships that are accountable to Indigenous peoples and “resist repeating colonial and other relations of domination” (p. 23). As participants' reflections demonstrate, some settler food activists in Toronto are trying to approach Indigenous-settler

solidarities as “incommensurable, but not incompatible” (Snelgrove et al., 2014, p. 3) by working through the conflicts between Indigenous approaches and dominant organizational structures as well as finding common ground to build better relations between peoples and the earth.

Meanwhile, our findings also suggest that there is significant work to be done. Participants' efforts to build relationships with Indigenous peoples may be in the minority among food organizations in the city more generally, as our content analysis suggests. Our findings show that very few organizations seem to be prioritizing Indigenous partnerships, initiatives, or clarification regarding settler responsibilities to challenge and dismantle settler colonialism. Although website content does not necessarily speak to the actual work these organizations do on the ground, their public media plays a role in shaping the broader conversation around decolonization and reconciliation, which as of now is not presented as a priority for most food organizations in the city. Concurrently, some participants discussed how current collaborations with Indigenous peoples tend to occur more peripherally on an event-by-event basis, rather than being central to organizational programming. This suggests that Toronto settler food organizations more broadly have yet to respond to calls to support Indigenous resurgence and challenge settler colonialism.

Looking to the larger systems that shape the landscape of food activism, participants' responses highlight that food organizations' capacities to align with Indigenous struggles are limited by donor-centric funding models, strained budgets, problematic forms of leadership, and settler colonialism more broadly, which many participants saw as manifesting both through organizational practices and through the larger system in which organizations operate. These responses speak to a common challenge faced by food organizations,

where they typically fall into the role of emergency service providers filling in for the neoliberal “shadow state” and remain bound to their funders (Wakefield et al., 2013). Participants’ reflections on funding resonate with scholars who call for a shift in funding structures and priorities—in both government and organizations’ own funding programs—towards supporting Indigenous food sovereignty initiatives in ways that affirm Indigenous communities’ rights to design programs on their own terms and determine how funds are used (Rotz & Kepkiewicz, 2018; Robin et al., 2023). For activists at food organizations, these shifts in funding priorities would support solidarity-building efforts by moving decolonizing work from sitting “perpetually on the side of their desk” towards the center (Bohunicky et al., 2021, p. 149).

Considering these systemic issues, participants’ visions for the future reveal some points of contention that deserve greater attention in food movement spaces. Many participants reiterated settler claims to sovereignty and self-determination, which scholars have problematized for being pervasive, yet largely

Conclusion

In this article, we have explored how settler food activists in Toronto perceive and/or work towards solidarity with Indigenous peoples in their work. The findings shed light on settler understandings of how Indigenous-settler solidarities are taking shape in Toronto’s food sovereignty movement, highlighting the progress as well as the challenges of working within organizational structures and settler colonialism at large. Based on participants’ reflections, we argue that many settler food activists strive to unpack settler complicities

unexamined within settler-led food movements (Grey & Patel, 2015; Kepkiewicz, 2018). While most participants called for Indigenous leadership and Land Back to be foregrounded in food activism moving forward, there was disjuncture in activists’ understandings of what this means in practice and a notable silence surrounding what systemic transformation might look like. Settler-led food movements might take guidance from scholars and activists who outline key steps towards these goals, such as pushing for the return of land to Indigenous peoples and the restoration of Indigenous legal traditions as systems that apply not only to Indigenous peoples, but also to settler communities in their roles as treaty partners¹² (ICFSC, 2010; Rotz & Kepkiewicz, 2018; Kepkiewicz & Dale, 2018). By advocating for these systemic transformations in support of Indigenous struggles for sovereignty, rather than further atomization, we might begin to enter relationships of solidarity based on fostering “the shared authority to speak the law together, to find ways to become properly entangled” (Pasternak, 2017, p. 269).

and responsibilities, learn from Indigenous knowledges, support Indigenous leadership, and build decolonizing relationships on Indigenous terms. At the same time, our findings also show that participants’ efforts to build solidarity with Indigenous peoples may be peripheral within Toronto’s food activist community more broadly, and more work needs to be done to center Indigenous struggles for self-determination in food movements going forward. While food organizations face structural barriers like dependency on corporatized

¹² See Starblanket (2019) for a fulsome analysis of treaty interpretation and the roles, rights and responsibilities of treaty partners.

and donor-driven funding models and budgetary constraints, settler food activists have an obligation to do more to complicate our visions of food system change, let go of claims to define food systems on Indigenous lands, and advocate for systemic transformation towards decolonization.

This research contributes to dialogues surrounding food sovereignty and Indigenous-settler relations in so-called Canada, responding to calls for greater empirical work on settler colonialism and food movements and how food activists understand their roles and responsibilities to Indigenous peoples. It also contributes to understandings of food movements as potential spaces for transformation of Indigenous-settler relations, which Kepkiewicz (2018) points out

has been underexplored in literature examining Indigenous-settler solidarities (Land, 2015; Davis et al., 2017; Boudreau Morris, 2017) but is now emerging (Bohunicky et al., 2021). While we have aimed to speak primarily to food activist communities at the grassroots, this research may also contribute to greater dialogue between food movement actors, researchers, and policy makers surrounding what changes might better support widespread decolonization of our food systems and relationships with Indigenous peoples. We hope this project helps to foster more critical conversations among settler food activists—and settlers in general—surrounding our complicities and responsibilities to Indigenous peoples as treaty partners in our quest to build more sustainable food systems.

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