



the journal of the Canadian Association for Food Studies
la revue de l'Association canadienne des études sur l'alimentation

Vol 9 No 2 (2022)



canadianfoodstudies.ca

c/o Department of Health Sciences
Lakehead University
955 Oliver Road
Thunder Bay (ON) P7B 5E1

ISSN: 2292-3071

IN THIS ISSUE

THEMED SECTION

Towards Just Food Futures: Divergent approaches and possibilities for collaboration across difference

Marit Rosol, Eric Holt-Giménez, Lauren Kepkiewicz, Elizabeth Vibert

An unconditional basic income is necessary but insufficient to transition towards just food futures

Elaine Power, Aric McBay

Rotten asparagus and just-in-time workers: Canadian agricultural industry framing of farm labour and food security during the COVID-19 pandemic

Anelyse Margaret Weiler, Evelyn Encalada Grez

Reformist, progressive, radical: The case for an inclusive alliance

Janet Elizabeth Poppendieck

The community food centre: Using relational spaces to transform deep stories and shift public will

Syma Habib

Enacting just food futures through the state evidence from Brazil

Ricardo Barbosa Jr., Estevan Coca

Introspecting food movements in Canada:

Unpacking tensions towards justice and sustainability

Amanda Wilson, Charles Z. Levkoe

'Biotechnologizing' or 'democratizing'?

Unraveling the diversity of resistance to GMOs in Guatemala

Carrie Seay Fleming

Sharing the struggle for fairness:

Exploring possibilities for solidarity & just labour in organic agriculture

Susanna Klassen, Fuerza Migrante, Hannah Wittman

Food activism and negotiating the gendered dynamics of public cultures of care

Teresa Lloro, Freya González

Striving toward a peasant identity: The influence of the global peasant movement on three women farmers in Canada

Roseann Lydia Kerr, Erin Richan, Coral Sproule, Ayla Fenton

Transformation or the next meal?

Global-local tensions in food justice work

Elizabeth Vibert, Bikrum Singh Gill, Matt Murphy,

Astrid Pérez Piñán, Claudia Puerta Silva

Breadlines, victory gardens, or human rights?:

Examining food insecurity discourses in Canada

Audrey Tung, Reuben Rose-Redwood, Denise Cloutier

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Unwrapping school lunch: Examining the social dynamics and caring relationships that play out during school lunch

Jennifer L. Black, Rachel Mazac, Amber Heckelman, Sinikka Elliott

BOOK/ART/EVENT REVIEW

Review of Eat Local, Taste Global: How ethnocultural food reaches our tables

Regan Zink





This issue includes a Themed Section that brings together some of the contributions to and reflections from a virtual three-day workshop held in May 2021, where the authors explored collaborative possibilities within, between, and beyond food movements. Graphic recorder and artist Lynne Dalglish attended the final “affinity mapping” sessions of the workshop and produced the issue’s cover illustration. It speaks to the tensions that defined discussions and that

shape struggles for food justice more broadly: for example, tensions between basic needs and the need for structural transformation; between reformist and radical strategies; and between approaches focused on food systems and those targeting income, welfare, and labour policies. Finally, the illustration reminds us that “all the work we are doing is within the structure of white supremacy” and its intersecting systems of colonialism, capitalism, and heteropatriarchy.

guest editors: Marit Rosol, Eric Holt-Giménez, Lauren Kepkiewicz, Elizabeth Vibert



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.

*Corresponding author: marit.rosol@ucalgary.ca

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).

References

- Akram-Lodhi, A. H. (2020). Contemporary pathogens and the capitalist world food system. *Canadian Journal of Development Studies / Revue canadienne d'études du développement*, 42(1-2), 18-27. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02255189.2020.1834361>
- Akram-Lodhi, A. H. (2021). I will follow? Authoritarian populism, past and present. *The Journal of Peasant Studies*, 1-15. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03066150.2021.1961224>
- Alfred, T. (1999). *Peace, power, righteousness: An Indigenous manifesto*. Oxford University Press.
- Alfred, T., & Corntassel, J. (2005). Being Indigenous: Resurgences against contemporary colonialism. *Government and Opposition*, 40(4), 597-614. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1477-7053.2005.00166.x>

- Alkon, A., & Agyeman, J. (Eds.). (2011). *Cultivating food justice: Race, class, and sustainability*. MIT Press.
- Amin, S. (2011). Preface: Food sovereignty: A struggle for convergence in diversity. In E. Holt-Giménez (Ed.), *Food movements unite! Strategies to transform our food systems* (pp. ix–xviii). Food First Books.
- Bannerji, H. (2000). *The dark side of the nation: Essays on multiculturalism, nationalism and gender*. Canadian Scholars.
- Barbosa Jr, R., & Coca, E. (2022). Enacting just food futures through the state: evidence from Brazil. *Canadian Food Studies / La Revue Canadienne des études sur l'alimentation* 9(2), 75-100. <https://doi.org/10.15353/cfs-rcea.v9i2.540>
- Black Creek Food Justice Network (BCFJN). (n.d.). *Fighting for food justice in the Black Creek community: Report, analyses and steps forward*. https://cec.info.yorku.ca/files/2012/04/FullReport_small-copy.pdf?x67656
- Blackmar, E. (2006). Appropriating “the commons”: The tragedy of property right discourse. In S. Low & N. Smith (Eds.), *The politics of public space* (pp. 49-80). Routledge.
- Böhm, S., Spierenburg, M., & Lang, T. (2020). Fruits of our labour: Work and organisation in the global food system. *Organization*, 27(2), 195-212. <https://doi.org/10.1177%2F1350508419888901>
- Bondi, L., & Laurie, N. (2005). Introduction: Working the spaces of neoliberalism: Activism, professionalisation and incorporation. *Antipode*, 37(3), 394-401. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.0066-4812.2005.00503.x>
- Borras Jr., S. M. (2010). The politics of transnational agrarian movements. *Development and Change*, 41(5), 771-803. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-7660.2010.01661.x>
- Brenner, N., Jessop, B., Jones, M., & MacLeod, G. (Eds.). (2003). *State/Space: A reader*. Blackwell Publishing.
- Byrd, J. A. (2011). *The transit of empire: Indigenous critiques of colonialism*. University of Minnesota Press.
- Cahuas, M. C. (2018). Burned, broke, and brilliant: Latinx community workers' experiences across the greater Toronto area's non-profit sector. *Antipode*, 51(1), 66-86. <https://doi.org/10.1111/anti.12411>
- Combahee River Collective. (1977). *The Combahee River collective statement*. Black Past. <https://www.blackpast.org/african-american-history/combahee-river-collective-statement-1977/>
- Corntassel, J., & Bryce, C. (2012). Practicing sustainable self-determination: Indigenous approaches to cultural restoration and revitalization. *The Brown Journal of World Affairs*, 18(2), 151-162. <https://doi.org/10.26300/t9qk-cd72>
- Coulthard, G. S. (2014). *Red skin, white masks: Rejecting the colonial politics of recognition*. University of Minnesota Press.

- Crenshaw, K. W. (1991). Mapping the margins: Intersectionality, identity politics, and violence against women of color. *Stanford Law Review*, 43(6), 1241-1299. <https://doi.org/10.2307/1229039>
- Cumbers, A. (2012). *Reclaiming public ownership: Making space for economic democracy*. Zed Books.
- Daigle, M. (2016). Awawanenitakik: The spatial politics of recognition and relational geographies of Indigenous self-determination. *The Canadian Geographer*, 60(2), 259-269. <https://doi.org/10.1111/cag.12260>
- Dale, B. (2021). Food sovereignty and the integral state: Institutionalizing ecological farming. *Geoforum*, 127, 137-150. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.geoforum.2021.10.010>
- de Sousa Santos, B. (2014). *Epistemologies of the South: Justice against epistemicide*. Routledge.
- Dean, M. (1999). *Governmentality*. Sage.
- DeFilippis, J., Fisher, R., & Shragge, E. (2006). Neither romance nor regulation: Re-evaluating community. *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, 30(3), 673-689. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2427.2006.00680.x>
- Edwards, M. (2008). *Just another Emperor? The myths and realities of philanthrocapitalism*. Demos: A Network for Ideas & Action, The Young Foundation.
- Engler, M., & Engler, P. (2014, 4 June). *Should we fight the system or be the change?* New Internationalist. <https://newint.org/features/web-exclusive/2014/06/04/fight-system-or-be-the-change>
- Etzioni, A. (1993). *The spirit of community: Rights, responsibilities, and the communitarian agenda*. Crown Pub.
- Fellows, M. L., & Razack, S. (1998). The race to innocence: Confronting hierarchical relations among women. *The Journal of Gender, Race and Justice*, 1, 335-352.
- Fraser, N. (1995). From redistribution to recognition? Dilemmas of justice in a 'post-socialist' age. *New Left Review* (I/212), 68-93.
- Freire, P. (2005). *Pedagogy of the oppressed: 30th anniversary edition* (M. Bergman Ramos, Trans.). Bloomsbury Publishing. (Original work published 1968).
- Friedmann, H. (2005). From colonialism to green capitalism: Social movements and emergence of food regimes. In F. H. Buttel & P. McMichael (Eds.), *New directions in the sociology of global development* (Vol. 11, pp. 227-264). Emerald Group.
- Friedmann, H. (2017). Changing food systems from top to bottom: Political economy and social movements perspective. In M. Koç, J. Sumner, & A. Winson (Eds.), *Critical perspectives in food studies* (2nd Ed., pp. 19-33). Oxford University Press.
- Fyfe, N. R. (2005). Making space for "neo-communitarianism"? The third sector, state and civil society in the UK. *Antipode*, 37(3), 536-557. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.0066-4812.2005.00510.x>

- Gengenbach, H., Schurman, R. A., Bassett, T. J., Munro, W. A., & Moseley, W. G. (2018). Limits of the New Green Revolution for Africa: Reconceptualising gendered agricultural value chains. *Geographical Journal*, 184(2), 208–214. <https://doi-org.ezproxy.library.uvic.ca/10.1111/geoj.12233>
- Ghose, R., & Pettygrove, M. (2014). Urban community gardens as spaces of citizenship. *Antipode*, 46(4), 1092-1112. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/anti.12077>
- Gibson-Graham, J. K., & Dombroski, K. (Eds.). (2020). *The handbook of diverse economies*. Edward Elgar.
- Gramsci, A. (2011). *Prison notebooks (Vol. 1, 2 & 3) (J. Buttigieg, Trans.; A. Callari, Ed.)*. Columbia University Press. (Original work published 1948).
- Guthman, J. (2004). The trouble with ‘organic lite’ in California: A rejoinder to the ‘conventionalisation’ debate. *Sociologia Ruralis*, 44(3), 301-316. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9523.2004.00277.x>
- Guthman, J. (2008). Neoliberalism and the making of food politics in California. *Geoforum*, 39(3), 1171-1183. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.geoforum.2006.09.002>
- Habib, S. (2022). Opportunity in crisis: shifting public will to transform food systems. *Canadian Food Studies / La Revue Canadienne des études sur l'alimentation* 9(2), 64-74. <https://doi.org/10.15353/cfs-rcea.v9i2.538>
- Hill Collins, P. (2019). *Intersectionality as critical social theory*. Duke University Press.
- Holt-Giménez, E., Patel, R., & Shattuck, A. (2009). *Food rebellions! Crisis and the hunger for justice*. Pambazuka Press.
- Holt-Giménez, E., & Shattuck, A. (2011). Food crises, food regimes and food movements: Rumblings of reform or tides of transformation? *The Journal of Peasant Studies*, 38(1), 109-144. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/03066150.2010.538578>
- Holt-Giménez, E. (2018). *Can We Feed the World Without Destroying It?* Polity.
- hooks, b. (1997). Sisterhood: Political solidarity between women. In D. T. Meyers (Ed.), *Feminist social thought: A reader* (pp. 484-500). Routledge.
- Ilcan, S., & Basok, T. (2004). Community government: Voluntary agencies, social justice, and the responsabilization of citizens. *Citizenship Studies*, 8(2), 129-144. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1362102042000214714>
- Indigenous Circle, & Food Secure Canada. (2011). *Indigenous food sovereignty: Discussion papers of the people's food policy project*. Food Secure Canada. <https://foodsecurecanada.org/resources-news/newsletters/discussion-papers-peoples-food-policy#1>
- Jessop, B. (1990). *State theory: Putting the capitalist state in its place*. Polity.
- Jessop, B. (2002). *The Future of the Capitalist State*. Polity.

- Jessop, B. (2007a). From micro-powers to governmentality: Foucault's work on statehood, state formation, statecraft and state power. *Political Geography*, 26, 24-40.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.polgeo.2006.08.002>
- Jessop, B. (2007b). *State power*. Polity Press.
- Justicia for Migrant Workers (J4MW). (2022). Harvesting freedom.
<https://harvestingfreedom.org/>
- Kearns, A., & Forrest, R. (2000). Social cohesion and multilevel urban governance. *Urban Studies*, 37(5-6), 995-1017. <https://doi.org/10.1080%2F00420980050011208>
- Kennett, P., & Forrest, R. (2006). The neighbourhood in a European context. *Urban Studies*, 43(4), 713-718. <https://doi.org/10.1080%2F00420980600597368>
- Kepkiewicz, L., Chrobok, M., Whetung, M., Cahuas, M., Gill, J., Walker, S., & Wakefield, S. (2015). Beyond inclusion: Toward an anti-colonial food justice praxis. *Journal of Agriculture, Food Systems, and Community Development*, 5(4), 99-104.
<https://doi.org/10.5304/jafscd.2015.054.014>
- Kepkiewicz, L. (2020). Whose land? Complicating settler understandings of land in Canada. *ACME: An International Journal for Critical Geographies*, 19(1), 245-269.
- Kerr, R., Richan, E., Fenton, A., & Sproule, C. (2022). Striving toward a peasant identity: The influence of the global peasant movement on three women farmers in Canada. *Canadian Food Studies / La Revue Canadienne des études sur l'alimentation* 9(2), 205-225.
<https://doi.org/10.15353/cfs-rcea.v9i2.535>
- Klassen, S., Migrante, F., & Wittman, H. (2022). Sharing the struggle for fairness: exploring the possibilities for solidarity & just labour in organic agriculture. *Canadian Food Studies / La Revue Canadienne des études sur l'alimentation* 9(2), 147-179.
<https://doi.org/10.15353/cfs-rcea.v9i2.536>
- Kobayashi, A. (1994). Coloring the field: Gender, “race,” and the politics of fieldwork. *The Professional Geographer*, 46(1), 73-80. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.0033-0124.1994.00073.x>
- Ladner, K. L. (2014). Political genocide: Killing nations through legislation and slow-moving poison. In A. L. Hinton, A. Woolford, & J. Benvenuto (Eds.), *Colonial genocide in Indigenous North America* (pp. 226-245). Duke University Press.
- Lang, T., & Heasman, M. (2004). *Food wars: the global battle for minds, mouths, and markets*. Earthscan.
- Lloro, T., & González, F. (2022). Food activism, education, and negotiating the gendered dynamics of public cultures of care *Canadian Food Studies / La Revue Canadienne des études sur l'alimentation* 9(2), 180-204. <https://doi.org/10.15353/cfs-rcea.v9i2.537>
- MacKinnon, D. (2000). Managerialism, governmentality and the state: A neo-Foucauldian approach to local economic governance. *Political Geography*, 19(3), 293-314.
[https://doi.org/10.1016/S0962-6298\(99\)00086-4](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0962-6298(99)00086-4)

- MacLeavy, J. (2008). Managing diversity? 'Community cohesion' and its limits in neoliberal urban policy. *Geography Compass*, 2(2), 538-558. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1749-8198.2008.00100.x>
- Manuel, A., & Derrickson, R. M. (2015). *Unsettling Canada: A national wake-up call*. Between the Lines.
- Maracle, L. (2003). The operation was successful but the patient died. In A. Walkem & H. Bruce (Eds.), *Box of treasures or empty box? Twenty years of Section 35* (pp. 308-314). Theytus Books.
- Martínez-Torres, M. E., & Rosset, P. M. (2014). Diálogo de saberes in La Vía Campesina: food sovereignty and agroecology. *The Journal of Peasant Studies*, 41(6), 979-997. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03066150.2013.872632>
- Marx, K. (1995). *The poverty of philosophy. Answer to "Philosophy of Poverty/ La Philosophie de la Misère" by M. Proudhon. With preface by Friedrich Engels. Translated by H. Quelch*. Prometheus Books. (Original work published 1847).
- Mayer, M. (2003). The onward sweep of social capital: Causes and consequences for understanding cities, communities and urban movements. *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, 27(1), 110-132. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-2427.00435>
- McCarthy, J. (2005). Commons as counterhegemonic projects. *Capitalism Nature Socialism*, 16(1), 9-24. [10.1080/1045575052000335348](https://doi.org/10.1080/1045575052000335348)
- McCarthy, J. (2009). Commons. In N. Castree, D. Demeritt, D. Livermann, & B. Rhoads (Eds.), *A companion to environmental geography* (pp. 498-514). Wiley-Blackwell.
- McKay, B., Nehring, R., & Walsh-Dilley, M. (2014). The 'state' of food sovereignty in Latin America: Political projects and alternative pathways in Venezuela, Ecuador and Bolivia. *The Journal of Peasant Studies*, 41(6), 1175-1200. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03066150.2014.964217>
- McMichael, P. (2014). Historicizing food sovereignty. *The Journal of Peasant Studies*, 41(6), 933-957. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03066150.2013.876999>
- Monture-Angus, P. (1999). *Journeying forward: Dreaming First Nation's independence*. Fernwood Publishing.
- Moreton-Robinson, A. (2016). Introduction: Locations of engagement in the First World. In A. Moreton-Robinson (Ed.), *Critical Indigenous studies: Engagements in First World locations* (pp. 3-18). University of Arizona Press.
- Morgan, K., & Santo, R. (2018). The rise of municipal food movements. In S. Skordili & A. Kalfagianni (Eds.), *Localizing global food: short food supply chains as responses to agri-food system challenges* (pp. 27-40). Routledge.
- Morrison, R. (1989). *We build the road as we travel*. New Society Publishers. Morrison, D. (2011). Indigenous food sovereignty: A model for social learning. In H. Wittman, A. A. Desmarais, & N. Wiebe (Eds.), *Food sovereignty in Canada: Creating just and sustainable food systems* (pp. 97-113). Fernwood Publishing.

- Morrison, D. (2011). Indigenous food sovereignty: A model for social learning. In H. Wittman, A. A. Desmarais, & N. Wiebe (Eds.), *Food sovereignty in Canada: Creating just and sustainable food systems* (pp. 97-113). Fernwood Publishing.
- Morrison, D. (2020). Reflections and realities: Expressions of food sovereignty in the Fourth World. In P. Settee & S. Shukla (Eds.), *Indigenous food systems: Concepts, cases, and conversations* (pp. 17-38). Canadian Scholars.
- Paddison, R. (2001). Communities in the city. In R. Paddison (Ed.), *Handbook of Urban Studies* (pp. 194-205). Sage.
- Patel, R., & Moore, J. W. (2017). *A history of the world in seven cheap things. A guide to capitalism, nature, and the future of the planet*. University of California Press.
- Pérez Piñán, A., & Vibert, E. (2019). The view from the farm: Gendered contradictions of the measurement imperative in global goals. *Journal of Human Development and Capabilities*, 20(4), 436-450. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19452829.2019.1659237>
- Polanyi, K. (1944). *The great transformation*. Beacon Press.
- Poppendieck, J. (2022). Reformist, progressive, radical: The case for an inclusive alliance. *Canadian Food Studies / La Revue Canadienne des études sur l'alimentation* 9(2), 53-63. <https://doi.org/10.15353/cfs-rcea.v9i2.534>
- Poulantzas, N. (1978). *State, power, socialism*. New Left Books.
- Power, E., & McBay, M. (2022). An unconditional basic income is necessary but insufficient to transform towards just food futures. *Canadian Food Studies / La Revue Canadienne Des Études Sur l'alimentation* 9(2), 31-37. <https://doi.org/10.15353/cfs-rcea.v9i2.533>
- Raekstad, P. (2018). Revolutionary practice and prefigurative politics: A clarification and defense. *Constellations*, 25(3), 359-372. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-8675.12319>
- Razack, S. (1998). *Looking white people in the eye: Gender, race, and culture in courtrooms and classrooms*. University of Toronto Press.
- Rosol, M. (2010). Public participation in post-Fordist urban green space governance: The case of community gardens in Berlin. *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, 34(3), 548–563. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2427.2010.00968.x>
- Rosol, M. (2013). Governing (in) the neoliberal city: The Foucauldian analysis of neoliberalism as a contribution to urban research. *Geographische Zeitschrift*, 101(3-4), 132-147. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/24576972>
- Rosol, M. (2015). Governing cities through participation – A foucauldian analysis of CityPlan Vancouver. *Urban Geography*, 36(2), 256-276. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02723638.2014.952542>
- Rosol, M. (2018). Politics of urban gardening. In K. Ward, A. E. G. Jonas, B. Miller, & D. Wilson (Eds.), *The Routledge handbook on spaces of urban politics* (pp. 134–145). Routledge.

- Rosol, M., & Rosol, C. (2022). Food, pandemics, and the Anthropocene: On the necessity of food and agricultural change. *Canadian Food Studies / La Revue canadienne des études sur l'alimentation*, 9(1), 281-293. <https://doi.org/10.15353/cfs-rcea.v9i1.532>
- Routledge, P., Cumbers, A., & Derickson, K. D. (2018). States of just transition: Realising climate justice through and against the state. *Geoforum*, 88, 78-86. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.geoforum.2017.11.015>
- Scoones, I., Edelman, M., Borras Jr., S. M., Forero, L. F., Hall, R., Wolford, W., & White, B. (Eds.). (2021). *Authoritarian populism and the rural world*. Routledge.
- Seay Fleming, C. (2022). 'Biotechnologizing' or 'democratizing'? Unraveling the diversity of resistance to GMOs in Guatemala. *Canadian Food Studies / La Revue Canadienne Des Études Sur l'alimentation* 9(2), 125-146. <https://doi.org/10.15353/cfs-rcea.v9i2.528>
- Shattuck, A., Schiavoni, C. M., & VanGelder, Z. (2015). Translating the politics of food sovereignty: Digging into contradictions, uncovering new dimensions. *Globalizations*, 12(4), 421-433. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14747731.2015.1041243>
- Simpson, L. B. (2011). *Dancing on our turtle's back: Stories of Nishnaabeg re-creation, resurgence, and a new emergence*. Arbeiter Ring Publishing.
- Simpson, A. (2014). *Mohawk interruptus: Political life across the borders of settler states*. Duke University Press.
- Sonnino, R., Tegoni, C. L. S., & De Cunto, A. (2019). The challenge of systemic food change: Insights from cities. *Cities*, 85, 110-116. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cities.2018.08.008>
- Swain, D. (2019). Not not but not yet: Present and future in prefigurative politics. *Political Studies*, 67(1), 47-62. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0032321717741233>
- The Red Nation. (2021). *Red deal: Indigenous action to save our earth*. Common Notions.
- Thatcher, M. (1987). Interview by Douglas Keay for Woman's Own, 23 September 1987. Published as "Aids, education and the year 2000!" in Woman's Own, 31 October 1987, pp. 8–10. <https://www.margareththatcher.org/document/106689>
- Tuck, E., & Yang, K. W. (2012). Decolonization is not a metaphor. *Decolonization. Indigeneity, Education & Society*, 1(2), 1-40.
- Tuhiwai Smith, L. (1999). *Decolonizing methodologies: Research and Indigenous peoples*. Zed Book Ltd.
- Tung, A., Redwood, R. R., & Cloutier, D. (2022). Breadlines, victory gardens, or human rights?: examining food insecurity discourses in Canada. *Canadian Food Studies / La Revue Canadienne des études sur l'alimentation* 9(2), 249-276. <https://doi.org/10.15353/cfs-rcea.v9i2.530>
- U.S. Department of State. (2021). *Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in the United States*. Bureau of democracy, human rights, and labor. <https://www.state.gov/non-governmental-organizations-ngos-in-the-united-states/>

- Vaiou, D., & Kalandides, A. (2015). Practices of collective action and solidarity: Reconfigurations of the public space in crisis-ridden Athens, Greece. *Journal of Housing and the Built Environment*, 1-14. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/s10901-015-9468-z>
- van der Ploeg, J. D. (2020). Farmers' upheaval, climate crisis and populism. *The Journal of Peasant Studies*, 47(3), 589-605. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03066150.2020.1725490>
- Vibert, E., Gill, B., Murphy, M., Pérez Piñánd, A., & Puerta Silva, C. (2022). Transformation or the next meal? Global-local tensions in food justice work *Canadian Food Studies / La Revue Canadienne des études sur l'alimentation* 9(2), 226-248. <https://doi.org/10.15353/cfs-rcea.v9i2.531>
- Weiler, A. M., & Encalada Grez, E. (2022). Rotten asparagus and just-in-time workers: Canadian agricultural industry framing of farm labour and food security during the COVID-19 pandemic. *Canadian Food Studies / La Revue Canadienne des études sur l'alimentation* 9(2), 38-52. <https://doi.org/10.15353/cfs-rcea.v9i2.521>
- Welsh, J., & MacRae, R. (1998). Food citizenship and community food security: Lessons from Toronto, Canada. *Canadian Journal of Development Studies / Revue canadienne d'études du développement*, 19(4), 237-255. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/02255189.1998.9669786>
- Wilson, A., & Levkoe, C. Z. (2022). Introspecting food movements in Canada: Unpacking tensions towards justice and sustainability. *Canadian Food Studies / La Revue Canadienne Des Études Sur l'alimentation* 9(2), 101-124. <https://doi.org/10.15353/cfs-rcea.v9i2.524>
- Wright, E. O. (2010). *Envisioning real utopias*. Verso.
- Young, I. M. (2002). The ideal of community and the politics of difference. In G. Bridge & S. Watson (Eds.), *The Blackwell City reader* (pp. 430-439). Blackwell. (Original work published 1986).



Commentary

An unconditional basic income is necessary but insufficient to transition towards just food futures

Elaine Power^{a*} and Aric McBay^b

^a Queens University

^b National Farmers Union-Ontario

Abstract

In food systems scholarship, the case for basic income to reduce food insecurity is well-established. Less well-appreciated is the potential for basic income to support young farmers, improve rural vitality, promote gender equality and racial justice in agriculture, and assist farmers in building resilience in the face of climate chaos and other overlapping crises. In and of itself, basic income cannot transform the food system. However, by guaranteeing an income floor and thus freedom from necessity, it could be a potent tool in radical, democratic struggles against systems of oppression and towards justice—in the food system and beyond.

Keywords: Basic income; just food futures; rural vitality; food system justice; family farmers

*Corresponding author: power@queensu.ca

DOI: [10.15353/cfs-rcea.v9i2.533](https://doi.org/10.15353/cfs-rcea.v9i2.533)

ISSN: 2292-3071

Introduction

COVID-19 has shone a harsh light on injustices in the food system, from increased rates of food insecurity to the rapid spread of the virus in unhealthy spaces where food system workers live and toil. COVID has reminded us that essential workers in the food system tend disproportionately to be women, to come from racialized communities, or to be poorly paid, often in precarious employment without crucial benefits, like paid sick time. Similarly, COVID has made visible women's normally hidden and unequal burden of unpaid work in the home, including food work.

We argue that an unconditional basic income (BI), set at a level to cover basic costs of living, is necessary—but insufficient—to move towards justice in the food system. It would provide an income floor beneath which food producers, workers, and eaters would not fall, allowing us to meet basic needs and make better, freer choices about how we live, what we eat, and how our food is produced, processed, and distributed. Aric has come to this position from his experiences as a National Farmers Union organizer, a farmer on an organic family farm, an author on social movement strategy, and a direct-action campaign organizer. Elaine became a BI advocate after years of research on food insecurity and poverty; her new co-authored book details the transformative effects of the Ontario Basic Income Pilot for participants (Swift & Power, 2021).

Following Marxist feminist Kathi Weeks (2020), we propose that BI be understood as a tool in the struggle for just food futures, not as an end in itself, but as a mechanism to support “survival pending revolution” and an expression of solidarity with those most marginalized in the food system (see Poppendieck, 2022, this issue). Having a stable income adequate to meet basic needs promotes the freedom required for those most marginalized in the food system to participate in food production (see Kerr et al., 2022, this issue) and in the grassroots struggle for the right to food envisioned by Tung, Rose-Redwood, and Cloutier (2022, this issue).

What is basic income?

There is no single model of basic income. There are many varieties—liberal, libertarian, neoliberal, techno-futurist, and socialist—and two main genealogies (Weeks, 2020). One genealogy is progressive, rooted in the 1970s Wages for Housework movement, the Black Panther Party, and the civil rights movement, among others (Weeks, 2020). Another lineage is right wing, libertarian, neoliberal, and pro-austerity; supported by Milton Friedman and Charles Murray, this tradition would use BI to shrink government and dismantle what remains of the welfare state. In Canada, there is a third model, a “mixed welfare” BI that closely resembles existing programs, with partial and conditional benefits (Young & Muvale, 2009). The Canadian Emergency Response Benefit (CERB), quickly rolled out in spring 2020 to support millions of

suddenly unemployed Canadians, conforms to Young & Mulvale’s (2009) “mixed welfare” model.

Left-wing critics of BI often set up the austerity version as a straw figure, without acknowledging that other versions exist (Weeks, 2020) or that the mainstream advocacy efforts for BI in Canada are progressive. The two main Canadian advocacy groups, the Basic Income Canada Network (BICN) and Coalition Canada Basic Income–Revenu du Base, have called for a BI that is unconditional, accessible to all who need it. They propose an unconditional BI that is adequate to meet basic needs for health and a life of dignity, reliable, respectful of individual autonomy, integral to a reinvigorated social safety net, supportive of labour rights (or laws, such as minimum-wage laws), and careful to leave no one worse off than before BI (see, for example, Coalition Canada, 2022).

We advocate an unconditional BI that is delivered through the tax system and provides the highest benefit levels to those with the lowest incomes, gradually tapering off as income rises, similar to the Canada Child Benefit (Pasma, Reghr, & Basic Income Canada Network, 2020). We understand BI to be reformist in the sense that it “loosens the grip” of capitalism rather than ending it (Weeks, 2020). However, we also see its revolutionary potential because it would force capitalism “to restructure social relations in terms more favourable to us” (Federici, 1995, p. 191) and could empower collective, democratic struggles for justice.

Achieving a strong, progressive BI will require a powerful coalition of activists to engage an extended political struggle (Weeks, 2020). A progressive BI provides a positive vision of something to fight *for* while fighting against injustice (Klein, 2017) and can be a unifying force among disparate social movement participants, including environmentalists, feminists, anti-racism activists, migrant labour rights activists, anti-poverty activists, family farmers, and others (Weeks, 2020). In contemporary struggles for racial justice, both the Movement for Black Lives (McFarland, 2016) and the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls (Core Working Group, 2021) have called for BI to begin to address the profound social and economic marginalization of Black and Indigenous peoples.

Basic income and the food system

On the consumption side of the food system, the case for BI to address food insecurity is well-established. Food insecurity is highly correlated with low income, meaning that the same groups who are most likely to be poor are also most likely to be food insecure, including single mothers, Black Canadians, and Indigenous people. The weight of the research evidence suggests that an adequate BI that covers basic needs could have a substantial impact on rates of food insecurity and its harmful effects, including poor mental and physical health (Ontario Dietitians in Public Health, 2020; Tarasuk, 2017).

There is less contemporary appreciation of the potential for BI to compensate unpaid domestic labour, including food work, and essential, highly gendered, public-care volunteer

work, such as that carried out by the Pomona Community Farmer Alliance (Lloro & González, 2022, this issue). BI was the key demand of the feminist, anti-capitalist Wages for Housework campaign that, in the 1970s, brought together Marxist feminists, welfare-rights activists, and others (Toupin, 2018). Never supported by liberal white feminists, the Wages for Housework campaign was all but forgotten until recently (Toupin, 2018). In much the same way as Wages for Housework imagined that BI could open up a wider variety of household forms (Federici, 2020; Weeks, 2020), food activists might imagine how BI could support more small-scale, household food production and community-level food initiatives like those described by Habib (2022, this issue), by freeing people from the necessity of full-time paid employment.

On the production side of the food system, BI would provide immediate, significant, stabilizing assistance to address some of the urgent problems facing rural communities and small and medium-sized farm operations, including the shortage of young farmers. To date, the BI movement has primarily focussed on urban dwellers and low-income eaters, but the inclusion of food producers highlights multiple issues facing family farmers and rural communities. Since the middle of the twentieth century, large-scale mechanization, corporate agriculture, and a focus on export-based production have created record levels of farm debt (Statistics Canada, 2021a) and contributed to the hollowing out of vibrant rural community life and to the deterioration of rural resilience and self-reliance (Desmarais, 2019). The combination of low net farm income and high land prices (Statistics Canada, 2021b) prevents new and young farmers, especially women and Black people, Indigenous people, and people of colour (BIPOC), from entering the field (Qualman, Akram-Lodhi, Desmarais, & Srinivasan, 2018; Statistics Canada, 2018). This has created a loss of skills, health problems in rural communities, and a risk to Canada's food security.

BI, by itself, cannot fix the high cost of farmland, which is the biggest single cost and barrier for new farmers. However, it can provide income stability, the lack of which can be catastrophic for new farmers. BI could make it easier for young and new farmers to get started as farmers, including women (Kerr et al., 2022, this issue) and BIPOC farmers, and to take on the risk of farmland ownership, to develop viable businesses, and to support non-extractivist, ecological agricultural practices that nurture the land and communities (Kerr et al., 2022 this issue; Vibert et al., 2022, this issue).

The effects of BI on agricultural-labour availability need careful consideration. BI pilot research suggests that BI doesn't affect labour-market participation but can cause shifts in overall employment patterns (Calnitsky & Latner, 2017; Calnitsky, Latner, & Forget, 2019; Forget, 2011; Kangas, Jauhiainen, Simanainen, & Ylikännö, 2019). Anecdotally, farmers in the 2020 growing season reported that the structure of the Canada Emergency Response Benefit (CERB) discouraged some farm workers from working full-time jobs or caused them to turn down farm employment altogether. Therefore, it is important to consider how BI could be "tuned" and integrated with other policies to have a beneficial impact on food production.

Considerations of BI and agricultural labour must also take account of the current exploitation of migrant workers. If extended on the basis of residency rather than of citizenship,

BI, along with other measures (see Klassen, Fuerza Migrante, & Wittman, 2022, this issue), could support fair and just labour practices for migrant workers. If food-system workers, including migrant agricultural workers, could walk away from unsafe and unhealthy conditions, such as those described by Weiler & Enclada Grez (2022, this issue), without fear of destitution or deportation, food producers and processors would be forced to provide safe working conditions and higher wages. If a BI program did not include migrant workers, it could actually worsen working conditions and labour shortages.

There are many other issues in the food system that BI could impact, and many that BI alone cannot address, including, for example, reparations for stolen Indigenous lands or the need for agricultural trade protections to ensure that the price of domestically produced food better reflects its true cost. For those in the growing movement for BI, attention to the food system will help inform robust design and thoughtful implementation, especially in rural parts of the country. For those in the movement for food justice, BI can help connect to other progressive and radical movements and facilitate the participation of those currently marginalized. Basic Income is not a silver bullet, but it could provide the freedom from want, scarcity, and desperation that is essential to imagine and struggle for more just ways of living together on the planet. That is Basic Income's most radical, revolutionary, and exciting possibility.

References

- Calnitsky, D., & Latner, J. (2017). Basic income in a small town: Understanding the elusive effects on work. *Social Problems*, 64(3), 373–397.
- Calnitsky, D., Latner, J., & Forget, E. (2019). Life after work: The impact of basic income on nonemployment activities. *Social Science History*, 43(4), 657–677.
- Coalition Canada. (2022). *The Basic Income We Want*. <https://basicincomecoalition.ca/en/what-is-basic-income/basic-income-we-want-for-canada/>
- Core Working Group. (2021). *2021 Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women, Girls and 2SLGBTQQIA+ People National Action Plan*. https://mmiwg2splus-nationalactionplan.ca/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/NAP_Report_EN.pdf
- Desmarais, A. A. (Ed.) (2019). *Frontline farmers: How the National Farmers Union resists agribusiness and creates our new food future*. Black Point, NS: Fernwood Publishing.
- Federici, S. (1995). Wages against housework. In E. Malos (Ed.), *The politics of housework* (2nd ed., pp. 187–194). Cheltenham: New Clarion Press.
- Federici, S. (2020). *Revolution at point zero: Housework, reproduction and feminist struggle* (2nd ed.). Toronto, ON: Between the Lines.
- Forget, E. L. (2011). The town with no poverty: The health effects of a Canadian guaranteed annual income field experiment. *Canadian Public Policy*, 37(3), 283–305.

- Habib, S. (2022). Opportunity in crisis: shifting public will to transform food systems. *Canadian Food Studies / La Revue Canadienne des études sur l'alimentation* 9(2), 64-74. <https://doi.org/10.15353/cfs-rcea.v9i2.538>
- Kangas, O., Jauhiainen, S., Simanainen, M., & Ylikännö, M. (2019). *The basic income experiment, 2017–2018 in Finland: Preliminary results*. https://julkaisut.valtioneuvosto.fi/bitstream/handle/10024/161361/Report_The%20Basic%20Income%20Experiment%2020172018%20in%20Finland.pdf
- Kerr, R., Richan, E., Fenton, A., & Sproule, C. (2022). Striving toward a peasant identity: The influence of the global peasant movement on three women farmers in Canada. *Canadian Food Studies / La Revue Canadienne des études sur l'alimentation* 9(2), 205-225. <https://doi.org/10.15353/cfs-rcea.v9i2.535>
- Klassen, S., Migrante, F., & Wittman, H. (2022). Sharing the struggle for fairness: exploring the possibilities for solidarity & just labour in organic agriculture. *Canadian Food Studies / La Revue Canadienne des études sur l'alimentation* 9(2), 147-179. <https://doi.org/10.15353/cfs-rcea.v9i2.536>
- Klein, N. (2017). *No is not enough: Resisting the new shock politics and winning the world we need*. Toronto, ON: Penguin Random House Knopf Canada.
- Lloro, T., & González, F. (2022). Food activism, education, and negotiating the gendered dynamics of public cultures of care. *Canadian Food Studies / La Revue Canadienne des études sur l'alimentation* 9(2), 180-204. <https://doi.org/10.15353/cfs-rcea.v9i2.537>
- McFarland, K. (2016). *Black Lives Matter endorses UBI in official platform*. <https://basicincome.org/news/2016/08/united-states-black-lives-matter-endorses-ubi-official-platform/>
- Ontario Dietitians in Public Health. (2020). *Position statement and recommendations on responses to food insecurity*. www.odph.ca/upload/membership/document/2021-04/ps-eng-corrected-07april21_3.pdf
- Pasma, C., Reghr, S., & Basic Income Canada Network. (2020). *Basic income: Some policy options for Canada*. https://basicincomecanada.org/policy_options/
- Poppendieck, J. (2022). Reformist, progressive, radical: The case for an inclusive alliance. *Canadian Food Studies / La Revue Canadienne des études sur l'alimentation* 9(2), 53-63. <https://doi.org/10.15353/cfs-rcea.v9i2.534>
- Qualman, D., Akram-Lodhi, A. H., Desmarais, A. A., & Srinivasan, S. (2018). Forever young? The crisis of generational renewal on Canada's farms. *Canadian Food Studies / La Revue Canadienne des études sur l'alimentation*, 5(3), 100–127. <https://doi.org/10.15353/cfs-rcea.v5i3.284>
- Statistics Canada. (2018). *Table 32-10-0169-01 Number of farm operators by sex, age and paid non-farm work, Census of Agriculture historical data, 1991 to 2016*. <https://doi.org/10.25318/3210016901-eng>

- Statistics Canada (2021a). *Table 32-10-0045-01 Farm cash receipts, annual (x 1,000)*.
<https://doi.org/10.25318/3210004501-eng>
- Statistics Canada (2021b). *Table 32-10-0169-01 Number of farm operators by sex, age and paid non-farm work*, Census of Agriculture historical data, 1991 to 2016.
<https://doi.org/10.25318/3210016901-eng>
- Swift, J., & Power, E. (2021). *The case for basic income: Freedom, security, justice*. Toronto, ON: Between the Lines.
- Tarasuk, V. (2017). *Implications of a basic income guarantee for household food insecurity (Research paper No. 24)*. Thunder Bay, ON. www.northernpolicy.ca/bigandfoodinsecurity
- Toupin, L. (2018). *Wages for housework: A history of an international feminist movement, 1972–77* (K. Roth, Trans.). Vancouver, BC: UBC Press.
- Tung, A., Redwood, R. R., & Cloutier, D. (2022). Breadlines, victory gardens, or human rights?: examining food insecurity discourses in Canada. *Canadian Food Studies / La Revue Canadienne des études sur l'alimentation* 9(2), 249-276. <https://doi.org/10.15353/cfs-rcea.v9i2.530>
- Vibert, E., Gill, B., Murphy, M., Pérez Piñánd, A., & Puerta Silva, C. (2022). Transformation or the next meal? Global-local tensions in food justice work *Canadian Food Studies / La Revue Canadienne des études sur l'alimentation* 9(2), 226-248.
<https://doi.org/10.15353/cfs-rcea.v9i2.531>
- Weeks, K. (2020). Anti/postwork feminist politics and a case for basic income. *triple C: communication, capitalism & critique*, 18(2), 575–594.
- Weiler, A. M., & Encalada Grez, E. (2022). Rotten asparagus and just-in-time workers: Canadian agricultural industry framing of farm labour and food security during the COVID-19 pandemic. *Canadian Food Studies / La Revue Canadienne des études sur l'alimentation* 9(2), 38-52. <https://doi.org/10.15353/cfs-rcea.v9i2.521>
- Young, M., & Muvale, J. P. (2009). *Possibilities and prospects: The debate over a guaranteed income*. Ottawa, ON.
https://www.policyalternatives.ca/sites/default/files/uploads/publications/reports/docs/CCP_A_Guaranteed_Income_Nov_2009.pdf



Perspective

Rotten asparagus and just-in-time workers: Canadian agricultural industry framing of farm labour and food security during the COVID-19 pandemic

Anelyse M. Weiler^{a*} and Evelyn Encalada Grez^b

^a University of Victoria

^b Simon Fraser University

Abstract

In early stages of the global COVID-19 pandemic, the Canadian farming industry expressed panic that travel restrictions could disrupt the arrival of migrant farmworkers from the Majority World. In this Perspective essay, we consider how farm industry lobbying successfully framed delays to hiring migrant farmworkers as a threat to national food security. After demonstrating how migrant workers have long been situated in spaces of legal exceptionalism, we argue that framing migrant farmworkers as essential for the national public good of domestic food production conceals how they are also essential for private capital accumulation in agribusiness. In the haste to hire migrant workers quickly, Canadian federal and provincial governments largely failed to prevent farmworker COVID-19 outbreaks and deaths predicted by researchers and activists. We conclude by underscoring the need to fundamentally transform temporary labour migration programs in ways that uphold migrant dignity beyond exceptionalism.

Keywords: Migrant workers; farmworkers; farm workers; COVID-19; food security

*Corresponding author: anelyse@uvic.ca

DOI: 10.15353/cfs-rcea.v9i2.521

ISSN: 2292-3071

Introduction

When people in Canada were just beginning to grapple with the global spread of a deadly, poorly understood virus in the spring of 2020, the farming industry warned of another looming existential threat: widespread domestic food scarcity. To curb the spread of COVID-19, the federal government announced domestic and international travel restrictions in March 2020 (Table 1). The Canadian farming industry declared these restrictions could lead to delays in hiring migrant farmworkers from the Majority World, with labour shortages leading to massive food shortages. This prominent industry-driven framing of migrant workers during the pandemic emphasized that hyperproductive migrant workers were essential to Canadian food security, that there was no other way to address farm labour requirements, and that exceptional measures were therefore appropriate to swiftly ensure migrant workers' continued presence in fields, orchards, and greenhouses.

Yet the hurry to match just-in-time workers with time-sensitive seasonal crop demands largely took precedence over taking the time needed to proactively ensure health and safety for migrant workers, which might have delayed their arrival or incurred greater costs for employers. Researchers and migrant advocates warned of heightened risks for workers stemming from the existing precarity baked into migrant farm workers' inability to freely choose their employers or easily transfer farms, barriers to accessing basic rights in practice, and deportable immigration status (e.g., Haley et al., 2020; Wright, 2020). They argued that it was dangerous for governments to devolve responsibility for monitoring workers' health to industry and individual employers, particularly given pre-COVID research showing some employer-provided housing was substandard and overcrowded (Horgan & Liinamaa, 2016). Despite these warnings, Canadian provincial and federal governments' choices resulted in widespread outbreaks. An estimated 8.7 percent of migrants tested positive for COVID-19 in Ontario alone in 2020, with outbreaks and deaths continuing into 2021 (Paperny, 2021).

In this Perspective essay, we critically examine the framing of migrant agricultural workers as essential to Canadian food security during the COVID-19 pandemic. While driven largely by industry, such framings have been circulated among government officials, the media, and civil society. How has this framing shaped outcomes for migrant agricultural workers, and what dynamics of agri-food capital does it obscure? Our piece provides insight into the Special Issue query about approaches to food system transformation that focus not on food itself, but on broader issues of decent work, racial justice, and dignified migration (Rosol et al., this issue). Specifically, we consider how government and industry actors frame capitalist-friendly labour migration policies as necessary to prevent national food insecurity, and how such policies clash with civil society efforts to advance health, safety, and dignity for migrant agricultural workers. Our analysis underscores the hazards of discursive strategies that equate the “essential” labour of migrant farmworkers with putting food on Canadian tables.

Table 1: Timeline of major policy changes affecting migrant farmworkers in Canada during COVID-19 pandemic

25 JANUARY	First suspected case of COVID-19 in Canada
11 MARCH	WHO declares COVID-19 a pandemic
16 MARCH	PMO announces international travel restrictions
17 MARCH	Grower associations begin to lobby government to exempt migrant farmworkers from travel restrictions
18 MARCH	International travel restrictions take effect; Canada establishes emergency response committee with farm industry stakeholders to assess labour issues
26 MARCH	Emergency order takes effect exempting some foreign nationals, including migrant workers with valid work permits, from travel restrictions; 14-day quarantine required
MID-MARCH TO MID-APRIL	Employment and Social Development Canada halts migrant farmworkers housing inspections for six weeks, then later resumes audits remotely
22 MARCH	Ontario's Norfolk County Medical Officer of Health (MOH) caps the number of self-isolating migrant farmworkers to 3 per bunkhouse; faces legal action by local farmers until mid-November
31 MARCH	BC Interior Health Authority announces investigation of COVID-19 outbreak at Bylands Nursery in West Kelowna among 14 migrants
12 APRIL	Agriculture Minister Marie-Claude Bibeau announces \$50 million fund to help employers of migrant workers comply with 14-day quarantine
13 APRIL	B.C. government begins to pay for and organize quarantine services for migrant farmworkers in Vancouver-area hotels
20 APRIL	Federal government amends <i>Immigration and Refugee Protection Regulations</i> , requiring employers of migrant workers to prevent COVID-19 spread and protect health and safety for workers
30 MAY	First death of migrant farmworker from COVID-19, Bonifacio Eugenio Romero
5 JUNE	Second death of migrant farmworker from COVID-19, Rogelio Muñoz Santos
15 JUNE	Mexican ambassador to Canada announces a pause in sending migrant farmworkers due to escalating COVID-19 safety concerns
20 JUNE	Third death of migrant farmworker from COVID-19, Juan Lopez Chaparro
21 JUNE	Mexico resumes sending SAWP workers after Canada and Mexico agree on farmworker safety improvements
24 JUNE	Ontario Chief MOH David Williams issues public health guidance indicating COVID-positive asymptomatic workers may continue to work; explains rationale is to encourage agricultural employers to participate in mass testing
1 JULY	Ontario's Windsor-Essex County MOH issues stop-work and isolation order for Nature Fresh Farm amid 191 COVID cases among mostly migrant workers
31 JULY	Federal government announces \$58.6 million for infrastructure and housing improvements, farm inspections, and migrant worker outreach

We begin by summarizing key health, safety and human rights issues that have affected migrant agricultural workers in Canada during the pandemic, including a timeline of major policy events in the spring and summer of 2020. Our Perspective essay draws from a selection of online mainstream news media coverage and government documents published within that sequence of events. Although we focus on agricultural workers, many of the issues we underscore bear relevance to pandemic employment conditions affecting migrant workers in industries such as seafood and fisheries, meatpacking, and food processing (e.g., Foster & Barnetson, 2020). Next, we draw on the concept of exceptionalism to make sense of industry and government failure to heed warnings from activists and researchers about the structural risks facing migrant workers. We argue that framing migrant workers as essential for the national

public good of domestic food production conceals how they are also essential for private capital accumulation in agribusiness. We conclude by reflecting on how the case of migrant agricultural workers in Canada relates to broader trends of employer power across the agriculture and agri-food industry, and opportunities to support migrant dignity in the pandemic and beyond.

The structure of Canada's migrant farmworker programs

For over half a century, Canadian farm employers have hired a steadily increasing number of workers from the Majority World on temporary seasonal contracts. In 1966, the Seasonal Agricultural Worker Program (SAWP) was initiated as a pilot project through a bilateral agreement between the Canadian and Jamaican governments. The SAWP eventually expanded to include Mexico and numerous other Caribbean Commonwealth countries (Satzewich, 2007). The SAWP remains the dominant agricultural stream of the overarching Temporary Foreign Worker Program. In 2018 migrant agricultural workers predominantly from Mexico and Jamaica made up 20 percent of all employees in Canadian agriculture, predominantly in labour-intensive sectors such as fruits, vegetables, and greenhouses (StatCan, 2020a; see also Hjalmarson, 2021).

Canadian farm employers frequently assert that without productive workers hired from the Majority World, their operations would be unviable and Canadian food security could collapse (Weiler et al., 2017). Employers often describe migrant agricultural workers as more productive than Canadians and crucial to filling domestic labour shortages, at times drawing on racialized and gendered stereotypes to infer that such productivity is inherent (Cohen & Caxaj, 2018; Preibisch & Binford, 2007). Migrant workers' productivity arises in a highly coercive labour-migration context, and their extensive manual skills and experience are not rewarded with commensurate pay or opportunities for upward mobility (Binford, 2019). Amid racialized global inequality, migrant-sending communities have been undermined by processes such as free trade agreements and structural adjustment programs (Otero, 2011). This backdrop of poverty and unemployment shapes how workers "consent" to conditions in Canada and perform productivity (Binford, 2013). Binford (2019) argues that by allowing employers to circumvent market pressure to make wages and working conditions more appealing for domestic workers, the SAWP has in effect made long-term labour shortages self-fulfilling. The COVID-19 pandemic dealt a deep socioeconomic blow to already struggling migrant-sending countries (e.g., Gaitán-Rossi et al., 2021), thus narrowing migrants' range of viable livelihood options and ratcheting up global asymmetries.

Unfreedom and deportability are core features of Canada's migrant farm worker programs (Encalada Grez, 2022; Smith, 2015). Migrant farmworkers hired through the SAWP are typically permitted to work in Canada for up to eight months annually. Formal routes to permanent residency are largely inaccessible, even if they return to Canada each year for decades. If a worker encounters substandard employment or housing, it can be difficult or impossible to change jobs because their visa is tied to an individual employer. Once a worker's

contract is terminated, they typically face immediate repatriation along with a loss of contractually provided housing, healthcare, and legal authorization to work in Canada. Workers face pressure to fulfill stereotypes of being an “ideal worker” because they know employers could repatriate them at any point, decline to rehire them the subsequent season, or give them a negative end-of-season evaluation (Basok & Belanger, 2016; McLaughlin, 2010). Employers are permitted to request workers based on their gender and nationality, which acts as a proxy for race (Gabriel & Macdonald, 2019).¹ As we discuss below, employer and government practices during COVID-19 have intensified migrant workers’ precariousness and unfreedom.

Pandemic panic

The flurry of policy changes affecting migrant farmworkers early in the COVID-19 pandemic exemplifies both the Canadian government’s sensitivity to agricultural lobbying and the potency of framing labour-migration delays as an urgent threat to national food security. As indicated in Table 1, on March 16, 2020, the Canadian government announced international air travel restrictions to prevent the spread of COVID-19 (Trudeau, 2020). This federal announcement immediately raised panic among growers anticipating the arrival of migrant farmworkers. Restrictions were to take effect at 12:01am ET on March 18 and barred incoming air travel for those who were not Canadian citizens, permanent residents, or Americans.² Immediately after the federal announcement, individual employers and growers’ associations nationwide called for exempting migrant farmworkers from travel restrictions:

“We will see shortages within our grocery stores in spring, summer and fall if the Seasonal Agricultural Workers Program (SWAP) [sic] is put on hold and we’re not allowed to bring those workers in.”

-Ken Wall, CEO, Sandy Shore Farms, Port Burwell, Ontario
(Lupton, 2020, para. 2)

“We don’t know what running out of food is like. I don’t want to experience that. I’m worried that because of good intentions to slow the spread of coronavirus, we’ll be seeing the next issue of a food shortage.”

-Brett Schuyler, Schuyler Farms, Simcoe, Ontario (Antonacci, 2020, para. 32)

“[paraphrased]: One missed seeding season throws off the whole year, affecting food prices in as little as six months.” . . . “It’s absolutely

¹ Legal complaints against gender discrimination by the United Food and Commercial eventually compelled the Mexican government to end discriminatory employer hiring practices by 2021. However, because an estimated 97 percent of SAWP workers are men, the employer practice of requesting workers by name each year reproduces gender inequities (Gabriel & McDonald, 2019).

² Exceptions were made for diplomats, immediate family members of citizens, and essential workers.

critical for farms and for food production that we get this labour . . . This needs to happen now.”

-Kenton Possberg, Parkland Ventures, Humboldt, Saskatchewan;
Director, Western Canadian Wheat Growers Association (Chiu & Saba,
2020, para. 30; 31)

“I have a lot of stakeholders that just don’t know what they’re going to do. We’re in an agricultural sector that literally when the fruit needs to be picked, you have hours to pick it.”

-Joe Sbrocchi, General Manager, Ontario Greenhouse Vegetable Growers
(Maru, 2020, para. 13)

“One of the things that we want to avoid at all costs during an event like the one we are going through is a food shortage or an explosion in the price of food due to its scarcity. Without the 15,000 [Temporary Foreign Workers] due to arrive in Canada starting in April, the entire horticultural production season is at stake.”

-Marcel Groleau, General President, L’Union des Producteurs Agricoles,
Québec [translated from French] (Groleau, 2020, para. 7)

These quotations illustrate the widespread industry framing of migrant farmworkers as essential to Canadians’ food security, with the warning that any delays in hiring migrant workers due to COVID-19 safety protocols could threaten time-sensitive crops and generate national food scarcity. This framing, which was echoed by Conservative opposition politicians and the seafood industry, compellingly taps into a basic human emotion—fear of insufficient food. Civil society organizations such as Food Secure Canada (2020) also described migrant workers as “ensur[ing] a steady food supply for Canadians” (p. 17) during the pandemic, but rather than foregrounding industry demands for just-in-time workers, their emphasis was on the need to strengthen workers’ rights. Later in the pandemic, the agriculture industry also framed delays, shortages, or outbreaks of COVID-19 among migrant farmworkers as a morally charged issue of food waste (e.g., Knox, 2020). This is exemplified in media coverage mourning the loss of 450 acres of asparagus due to a COVID-19 outbreak at an Ontario farm; some coverage did not even mention that at that time seven migrant employees were hospitalized due to COVID-19, one of whom later died (Antonacci, 2020; Sonnenberg, 2020).

By framing delays to hiring migrant workers as a threat to national food security, the agricultural industry successfully achieved their aims. On March 18th, an Emergency Response Committee was quickly formed to liaise with government officials and industry stakeholders. Two days later, the Canadian government announced that all migrant workers would be excluded from the travel restrictions. As part of the new exemptions, migrant workers were required to undergo health screening and quarantine for fourteen days upon arrival in Canada, while growers were responsible for quarantine housing and remunerating for the duration. The federal government subsequently released a series of guidelines for employers of migrant workers to minimize the spread of COVID-19 (Government of Canada, 2020). The federal government’s rationale for the travel exemption was to maintain Canada’s food security, in recognition of the

integral role of migrant workers in Canadian agriculture, seafood/fisheries, and food processing (IRCC, 2020). As Agriculture Minister Marie-Claude Bibeau explained, “The participation of temporary foreign workers on our farms and in our food businesses is absolutely necessary. It is nothing less than an issue of food security” (IRCC, 2020, para. 15). Industry organizations like the Canadian Federation of Agriculture applauded this move by the federal government (Wright, 2020).

Amid the haste to ensure migrant agricultural workers would arrive in time for the growing season, critics raised concerns that the economic interests of Canada’s agriculture and agri-food industry were being prioritized over workers’ health and safety. Researchers and advocates argued that employers were unlikely to consistently follow the federal government’s “Guidelines for Employers of Temporary Foreign Workers” because of a lack of coordination, oversight, and enforcement by government agencies (Emmanuel, 2020; Migrant Rights Network, 2020). For example, Barnetson et al. (2020) warned that federal government inspectors lacked the capacity to ensure employers adhered to farmworker accommodation requirements for the fourteen-day quarantine, pointing out that remote inspections made it easy to misrepresent actual housing conditions. Numerous studies prior to the pandemic had documented overcrowded and substandard employer-provided migrant accommodations, and researchers pointed out that it was highly unrealistic to expect that workers could physically distance from one another under existing housing conditions (Basok & George, 2020). Similarly, opposition party Bloc Québécois leader Yves-Francois Blanchet critiqued the federal government for neglecting the safety of migrant farmworkers and Canadians. He argued that the government should be responsible for quarantining migrant workers in federal facilities after their arrival, rather than leaving it up to farmers to monitor workers’ symptoms on farms (Wright, 2020). In response, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau emphasized, “We will work together to make sure that while meeting the needs of our farmers and our food supply chain, we do have the capacity and the certainty that Canadians are kept safe and that the possible spread of COVID-19 is limited (Wright, 2020, para. 17).”

Unsurprisingly, the rush to meet industry needs prior to developing proactive health and safety measures led to multiple outbreaks linked significantly to congregate housing (Public Health Ontario, 2020). The Office of the Auditor General of Canada (2021) confirmed advocates’ warnings had come to pass; its scathing report underscored the gross inadequacy of federal quarantine and housing inspections, which deteriorated in the second year of the pandemic. Even before the COVID-19 pandemic, Canadian governments had made migrant farmworkers vulnerable to health and human rights inequities by allowing employers to be responsible for overseeing far-reaching dimensions of migrants’ lives within and beyond the workplace (Horgan & Liinamaa, 2016). To stabilize globalized food chains with volatile margins and little built-in redundancy, global North governments before and during the COVID-19 pandemic have accommodated employer demands for just-in-time workers to enable “flexiprofit”—an attempt to nab competitive, short-term profits by devolving costs onto those with less bargaining power (Gertel & Sippel, 2014).

While employers and governments successfully framed the hasty hiring of migrant workers during COVID-19 as necessary for the public good of food security, this simple framing belies more complex flows of agricultural commodities, capital, and power. Likewise, migrant advocates often urged Canadians to support farmworkers' rights in the pandemic on the premise that workers "put food on Canadian tables." Canada's most economically prosperous agricultural operations employ an outsized proportion of migrant agricultural workers (Moldovan, 2015; Mussell, 2015). For example, in 2018, 65 percent of migrants worked on farms with more than \$2 million in revenue (StatCan, 2020b). This includes export crops and non-food sectors such as cannabis, ornamental flowers, Christmas trees, and tobacco. The pervasive framing of migrant workers as essential for the public good of domestic food security during COVID-19 eclipses how migrant workers are also essential for stabilizing private capital accumulation in both wealthy and economically marginal farm businesses (Weiler et al., 2021). Ultimately, migrant workers' need for decent work, a democratic voice in the workplace, and freedom of mobility all remain paramount regardless of whether Canadian eaters happen to benefit from their "essential" labour.

Migrant farmworker exceptionalism

Canadian federal and provincial governments have long relegated migrant farmworkers to a legal space of exclusion, exemption, and exceptionalism. Here, Giorgio Agamben's concept of the "state of exception" sheds light on migrant workers' legal disenfranchisement (Raulff, 2004). A state of exception "establishes a hidden but fundamental relationship between law and the absence of law. It is a void, a blank and this empty space is constitutive of a legal system" (Raulff, 2004, p. 609). For example, agricultural workers in numerous provinces are excluded from standard employment protections such as overtime pay and access to unionization (e.g., Vosko et al., 2019). Moreover, migrant workers' deportability, lack of job security, and employer-tied visas mean they often cannot access in practice the rights they formally have on paper. Migrant workers thus exist in a space of legal exceptionalism and "labour apartheid" (Paz Ramirez, 2013; Walia, 2010), and are therefore consigned to the whims of employers and globalized pressure to stabilize agri-food capital accumulation.

Canadian federal and provincial government actions during the COVID-19 pandemic intensified migrant worker exceptionalism while easing regulatory requirements for agricultural employers (e.g., allowing remote housing inspections, enabling farmers to more flexibly transfer workers between different employers, and expanding the list of eligible SAWP employers) (ESDC, 2020). When exempting workers from travel restrictions, the federal government also introduced capitalist-friendly modifications to make the administrative process more flexible, and to extend the maximum contract duration for certain migrant workers (IRCC, 2020). A particularly flagrant case of farmworker exceptionalism occurred on June 24th, 2020, when Ontario Chief Medical Officer of Health, David Williams, issued public health guidelines

indicating some COVID-positive asymptomatic workers could continue to work under appropriate conditions (Office of the Premier, 2020). While the guidance did not solely target migrant farmworkers, its stated rationale was to encourage farm employers to cooperate with mass COVID-19 testing by allaying their concerns of losing migrant workers to mandatory self-isolation (Baum & Grant, 2020a).

A state of heightened exceptionalism was evident in the case of migrant farmworker housing during the pandemic. For a period of six weeks between March and April, the federal government stopped conducting inspections of employer-provided housing, accepted three-year-old inspection reports, and later resumed only remote inspections (Baum & Grant, 2020b). It thus comes as little surprise that journalists documented overcrowded housing, infestations of cockroaches and bed bugs, unsanitary facilities, and workers failing to receive compulsory pay for their initial quarantine (Baum & Grant, 2020b). Reports also spotlighted employers prohibiting healthy migrant workers from leaving the farm premises post-quarantine for several months; two workers in B.C. were fired and repatriated after receiving a delivery of clothing and culturally appropriate food from local residents (Beaumont, 2020; Grant & Baum, 2020). Compared to provinces that left post-arrival quarantine arrangements up to employers, the B.C. government likely helped prevent some transmission of COVID-19 by paying for centralized Vancouver area hotels for migrant agricultural workers' fourteen-day quarantine. Overall, however, the pandemic intensified employers' capacity to restrict migrant farmworkers' movements, and it heightened the isolation and "social quarantining" of migrant workers from surrounding rural communities (Horgan & Liinamaa, 2017). Governments undermined protections for workers in order to stabilize an "exceptional" industry (Weiler et al., 2017).

Conclusion

While the COVID-19 pandemic stirred panic among the farming industry, government, and everyday eaters around food scarcity, the scramble to ensure migrant workers' "just-in-time" arrival for the growing season resulted in profound institutional failures to prioritize their health and safety. Tapping into people's visceral fears of food scarcity in a pandemic successfully encouraged multiple levels of government to carelessly capitulate to industry interests. Instead of proactively preventing outbreaks and deaths, governments and employers amplified racialized migrant workers' risk of exposure to COVID-19 while tightening restrictions on their freedom of mobility. In this respect, federal and provincial governments' responses to migrant workers mirror a broader pandemic trend across numerous global agri-food sectors, notably meatpacking, of prioritizing industry demands for access to workers with severely constrained bargaining power. Our essay thus sheds light on how powerful actors may reshape the flexible discourse of food security, in this case by justifying exceptional measures that prioritize the economic and nutritional securitization of the imagined national community over the wellbeing of racialized non-citizens from the Majority World (Anderson, 2006).

If migrant farmworkers' skills, training, and experience are indeed “essential” to the wellbeing of everyday eaters and the stability of the Canadian agriculture and agri-food industry, they deserve commensurate social and material rewards. This includes the migrant justice movement's calls for permanent residency on arrival, proactive enforcement of safety standards, full inclusion in employment protections, and a redistribution of racialized wealth, power, and ownership (Justice for Migrant Workers, 2020; Klassen et al., this issue). The COVID-19 pandemic offers an opening to reimagine a humane food system that dismantles coercion and upholds dignity for farmworkers.

Acknowledgements: We are grateful to the numerous reviewers who provided valuable feedback that helped strengthen this essay. We also thank the editors of this special issue, Marit, Eric, Lauren, and Charles.

References

- Anderson, B. (2006). *Imagined communities: Reflections on the origin and spread of nationalism*. Verso Books.
- Antonacci, J. P. (2020, April 4). *Norfolk farmers worry labour shortage amid COVID-19 could affect food supply*. Hamilton Spectator. <https://www.thespec.com/news/hamilton-region/2020/04/04/norfolk-farmers-worry-labour-shortage-amid-covid-19-could-affect-food-supply.html>
- Basok, T., & Belanger, D. (2016). Migration management, disciplinary power, and performances of subjectivity: Agricultural migrant workers in Ontario. *Canadian Journal of Sociology*, 41(2), 139-164. <https://doi.org/10.29173/cjs22284>
- Basok, T., & George, G. (2020, April 26). *Migrant workers face further social isolation and mental health challenges during coronavirus pandemic*. The Conversation. <https://theconversation.com/migrant-workers-face-further-social-isolation-and-mental-health-challenges-during-coronavirus-pandemic-134324>
- Barnetson, B., Caxaj, C. S., Cohen, A., Cole, D., Colindres, C., Drolet, N., Foster, J., Hanley, J., Hennebry, J. L., Huesca, E., Mayell, S., McLaughlin, J., Tew, M., & Vosko, L. (2020, June 1). *Recommendations for overcoming health challenges faced migrant agricultural workers during the COVID-19-virus pandemic*. Migrant Worker Health Expert Working Group. <http://www.migrantworker.ca/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/HC-recommendations-June-1-2020.pdf>
- Baum, K. B., & Grant, T. (2020a, July 2). *Confusion as health unit effectively shuts down farm operation over COVID-19 cases*. Globe & Mail. <https://www.theglobeandmail.com/canada/article-confusion-as-health-unit-effectively-shuts-down-farm-operation-over/>

- Baum, K. B., & Grant, T. (2020b, July 13). *Ottawa didn't enforce rules for employers of migrant farm workers during pandemic*. Globe & Mail. <https://www.theglobeandmail.com/canada/article-how-ottawas-enforcement-regime-failed-migrant-workers-during-the/>
- Beaumont, H. (2020, July 20). *Coronavirus sheds light on Canada's poor treatment of migrant workers*. The Guardian. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/jul/20/canada-migrant-farm-workers-coronavirus>
- Binford, L. (2013). *Tomorrow we're all going to the harvest: Temporary foreign worker programs and neoliberal political economy*. University of Texas Press.
- Binford, A. L. (2019). Assessing temporary foreign worker programs through the prism of Canada's Seasonal Agricultural Worker Program: Can they be reformed or should they be eliminated? *Dialectical Anthropology*, 43(4), 347–366. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10624-019-09553-6>
- Chiu, J., & Saba, R. (2020, March 18). *Migrant workers help grow our food. Coronavirus is leaving them in limbo*. The Star. <https://www.thestar.com/news/canada/2020/03/17/migrant-workers-help-grow-our-food-coronavirus-is-leaving-them-in-limbo.html>
- Cohen, A., & Caxaj, S. (2018). Bodies and borders: Migrant women farmworkers and the struggle for sexual and reproductive justice in British Columbia, Canada. *Alternate Routes: A Journal of Critical Social Research*, 29, 90–117.
- Emmanuel, R. (2020, April 9). *Federal guidelines for temporary foreign workers aren't enforceable, says advocate*. iPolitics. <https://ipolitics.ca/2020/04/09/federal-guidelines-for-temporary-foreign-workers-arent-enforceable-says-advocate/>
- Employment and Social Development Canada (ESDC). (2020, November 27). *Government of Canada expands National Commodity List to give farmers greater access to labour*. Cision. <https://www.newswire.ca/news-releases/government-of-canada-expands-national-commodity-list-to-give-farmers-greater-access-to-labour-815468631.html>
- Encalada Grez, E. (2022). Mexican Migrant Farmworkers in Canada: Death, Disposability, and Disruptions during COVID-19. *Mexican Studies/Estudios Mexicanos*, 38(1), 140-169. <https://doi.org/10.1525/msem.2022.38.1.140>
- Food Secure Canada (2020, May). *Growing resilience and equity: A food policy action plan in the context of Covid-19*. https://foodsecurecanada.org/sites/foodsecurecanada.org/files/fsc_-_growing_resilience_equity_10_june_2020.pdf
- Foster, J., & Barnetson, B. (2020, April 24). *Cargill, COVID, and the failure of Alberta OHS policy*. The Parkland Institute. https://www.parklandinstitute.ca/cargill_covid_and_the_failure_of_alberta_ohs_policy
- Gabriel, C., & Macdonald, L. (2019). Contesting gender discrimination in the Canadian Seasonal Agricultural Worker Program. *Canadian Ethnic Studies*, 51(3), 17-34. <http://doi.org/10.1353/ces.2019.0018>

- Gaitán-Rossi, P., Vilar-Compte, M., Teruel, G., & Pérez-Escamilla, R. (2021). Food insecurity measurement and prevalence estimates during the COVID-19 pandemic in a repeated cross-sectional survey in Mexico. *Public Health Nutrition*, 24(3), 412-421.
<https://doi.org/10.1017/s1368980020004000>
- Gertel, J., & Sippel, S. R. (Eds.). (2014). *Seasonal workers in Mediterranean agriculture: The social costs of eating fresh*. Routledge.
- Government of Canada (2020, April 22). *Guidance for employers of temporary foreign workers regarding COVID-19*. <https://www.canada.ca/en/employment-social-development/services/foreign-workers/employer-compliance/covid-guidance.html>
- Grant, T., & Baum, K. B. (2020, August 3). *Migrant workers on farms across Canada are being told they can't leave, raising rights concerns*. Globe & Mail.
<https://www.theglobeandmail.com/business/article-migrant-workers-on-farms-across-canada-are-being-told-they-cant-leave/>
- Groleau, M. (2020, March 13). *Coronavirus: Tout faire pour ralentir la propagation*. L'Union des Producteurs Agricoles. <https://www.upa.qc.ca/fr/textes-dopinion/2020/03/coronavirus-tout-faire-pour-ralentir-la-propagation/>
- Haley, E., Caxaj, S., George, G., Hennebry, J., Martell, E., & McLaughlin, J. (2020). Migrant farmworkers face heightened vulnerabilities during COVID-19. *Journal of Agriculture, Food Systems, and Community Development*, 9(3), 1-5.
<https://doi.org/10.5304/jafscd.2020.093.016>
- Hjalmarson, E. (2022). Sentenced for the season: Jamaican migrant farmworkers on Okanagan orchards. *Race & Class*, 63(4), 81-100. <https://doi.org/10.1177%2F03063968211054856>
- Horgan, M., & Liinamaa, S. (2016). The social quarantining of migrant labour: Everyday effects of temporary foreign worker regulation in Canada. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 43(5), 713–730. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1369183X.2016.1202752>
- Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC). (2020, March 20). *Canada provides update on exemptions to travel restrictions to protect Canadians and support the economy*. Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada. <https://www.canada.ca/en/immigration-refugees-citizenship/news/2020/03/canada-provides-update-on-exemptions-to-travel-restrictions-to-protect-canadians-and-support-the-economy.html>
- Justice for Migrant Workers. (2020, May 7). *Petition: Tell both the Government of Canada and the Government of Ontario farmworkers need urgent protections*. Harvesting Freedom. <https://harvestingfreedom.org/2020/05/07/petition-tell-the-ontario-government-farmworkers-need-urgent-protections/>
- Klassen, S., Migrante, F., & Wittman, H. (2022). Sharing the struggle for fairness: exploring the possibilities for solidarity & just labour in organic agriculture. *Canadian Food Studies / La Revue Canadienne des études sur l'alimentation* 9(2), 147-179.
<https://doi.org/10.15353/cfs-rcea.v9i2.536>
- Knox, J. (2020, October 28). *'I could cry': Millions of apples rotting in Okanagan orchards*. Global News. <https://globalnews.ca/news/7428870/millions-of-apples-rotting-okanagan/>

- Lupton, A. (2020, March 17). *COVID-19 restrictions on migrant workers will be devastating, Ontario farmers warn*. CBC London. <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/london/covid-19-restrictions-on-migrant-workers-will-be-devastating-ontario-farmers-warn-1.5500269>
- Maru, S. (2020, March 18). *Conservative MP calling on federal government to permit migrant workers into Canada*. CBC Windsor. <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/windsor/dave-epp-calling-for-liberals-to-allow-seasonal-workers-1.5500816>
- McLaughlin, J. (2010). Classifying the “ideal migrant worker”: Mexican and Jamaican transnational farmworkers in Canada. *Focaal*, 2010(57): 79-94. <https://doi.org/10.3167/FCL.2010.570106>
- Migrant Rights Network (2020, April 1). *Migrant worker quarantine letter*. <https://migrantrights.ca/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/MRN-Migrant-Worker-Quarantine-Letter.pdf>
- Moldovan, A. (2015). Labour relations in Canada in light of provincial cleavages for migrant farm workers. *Glendon Journal of International Studies*, 8(102), 1–25. <https://doi.org/10.25071/RYR.V2I0.40383>
- Mussell, A. (2015, April 21). *The economic impact of the Seasonal Agricultural Worker Program in the Ontario horticulture sector*. Canadian Agricultural Human Resource Council. <https://cahrc-ccrha.ca/resources/document/economic-impact-seasonal-agricultural-worker-program-ontario-horticulture-sector>
- Office of the Auditor General of Canada (2021). Report 13: Health and safety of agricultural temporary foreign workers in Canada during the COVID-19 pandemic. https://www.oag-bvg.gc.ca/internet/docs/parl_oag_202112_02_e.pdf
- Office of the Premier (2020, June 24). *Ontario takes immediate action to stop COVID-19 outbreaks in Windsor-Essex*. <https://news.ontario.ca/en/release/57366/ontario-takes-immediate-action-to-stop-covid-19-outbreaks-in-windsor-essex>
- Otero, G. (2011). Neoliberal globalization, NAFTA, and migration: Mexico's loss of food and labor sovereignty. *Journal of Poverty*, 15(4), 384-402. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/10875549.2011.614514>
- Paperny, A. M. (2021, April 14). *Migrant farmworkers coming to Canada remain at risk a year into COVID-19 pandemic*. Globe and Mail. <https://www.theglobeandmail.com/canada/article-migrant-farmworkers-coming-to-canada-remain-at-risk-a-year-into-covid/>
- Paz Ramirez, A. G. (2013). *Embodying and resisting labour apartheid: Racism and Mexican farm workers in Canada's Seasonal Agricultural Workers Program* [Master's thesis, University of British Columbia]. UBC Open Collections. <https://dx.doi.org/10.14288/1.0103384>
- Preibisch, K., & Binford, L. (2007). Interrogating racialized global labour supply: An exploration of the racial/national replacement of foreign agricultural workers in Canada. *Canadian Review of Sociology*, 44(1), 5–36. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1755-618X.2007.tb01146.x>

- Public Health Ontario. (2020, November 17). *Weekly Epidemiologic Summary COVID-19 in Ontario: Focus on November 8, 2020 to November 14, 2020*. Public Health Ontario. <https://www.publichealthontario.ca/-/media/documents/ncov/epi/covid-19-weekly-epi-summary-report.pdf?la=en>
- Raulff, U. (2004). An interview with Giorgio Agamben. *German Law Journal*, 5(5), 609-614. https://germanlawjournal.com/wp-content/uploads/GLJ_Vol_05_No_05_Raulff.pdf
- Rosol, M., Holt-Giménez, E., Kepkiewicz, L., & Vibert, E. (2022). Towards just food futures: Divergent approaches and possibilities for collaboration across difference. *Canadian Food Studies / La Revue Canadienne Des Études Sur l'alimentation* 9(2), 1-30. <https://doi.org/10.15353/cfs-rcea.v9i2.598>
- Satzewich, V. (2007). Business or bureaucratic dominance in immigration policymaking in Canada: Why was Mexico included in the Caribbean Seasonal Agricultural Workers Program in 1974? *Journal of International Migration and Integration*, 8(3), 255–275. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/s12134-007-0026-8>
- Smith, A. A. (2015). Troubling “Project Canada”: the Caribbean and the making of “unfree migrant labor”. *Canadian Journal of Latin American and Caribbean Studies/Revue Canadienne des Études Latino-Américaines et Caraïbes*, 40(2), 274-293. <https://doi.org/10.1080/08263663.2015.1054682>
- Sonnenberg, M. (2020, June 4). *Scotlynn pulls plug on asparagus harvest*. Simcoe Reformer. <https://www.simcoereformer.ca/news/local-news/scotlynn-pulls-plug-on-asparagus-harvest>
- StatCan (2020a, April 17). *COVID-19 disruptions and agriculture: Temporary foreign workers*. StatCan COVID-19: Data to insights for a better Canada. <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/45-28-0001/2020001/article/00002-eng.htm>
- StatCan (2020b, April 20). *Temporary foreign workers in the agricultural sector, 2016 to 2018*. <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/11-627-m/11-627-m2020030-eng.htm>
- Trudeau, J., Prime Minister of Canada. (2020, March 16). *Prime Minister announces new actions under Canada’s COVID-19 response*. <https://pm.gc.ca/en/news/news-releases/2020/03/16/prime-minister-announces-new-actions-under-canadas-covid-19-response>
- Vosko, L. F., Tucker, E., & Casey, R. (2019). Enforcing employment standards for migrant agricultural workers in Ontario, Canada: Exposing underexplored layers of vulnerability. *International Journal of Comparative Labour Law and Industrial Relations*, 35(2), 227-254.
- Walia, H. (2010). Transient servitude: Migrant labour in Canada and the apartheid of citizenship. *Race & Class*, 52(1), 71–84. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0306396810371766>
- Weiler, A. M., McLaughlin, J., & Cole, D. C. (2017). Food security at whose expense? A critique of the Canadian temporary farm labour migration regime and proposals for change. *International Migration*, 55(4), 48-63. <https://doi.org/10.1111/imig.12342>

- Weiler, A. M., Sexsmith, K., & Minkoff-Zern, L. A. (2021). Parallel Precarity: A Comparison of US and Canadian Agricultural Guest Worker Programs. *International Journal of Sociology of Agriculture & Food*, 26(2). <https://doi.org/10.48416/ij saf.v26i2.57>
- Wright, T. (2020, April 13). *Concerns raised about COVID-19 and migrant workers*. National Observer. <https://www.nationalobserver.com/2020/04/13/news/concerns-raised-about-covid-19-and-migrant-workers>



Perspective

Reformist, progressive, radical: The case for an inclusive alliance

Janet Poppendieck*

^aHunter College, City University of New York

Abstract

Scholars of food regimes and food movements have argued that the capacity of the contemporary food movement to achieve significant change is dependent upon the nature of the alliances formed by the progressive, food justice component of the broader array of food change organizations. They have urged alliances primarily with the more radical food sovereignty branch of the food movement. I argue that in the United States, which provides far more assistance to poor people as food assistance than as cash welfare, alliances with reformist food security organizations, and specifically the anti-hunger organizations focused on protecting and expanding federal food assistance, must be an essential part of any significant food justice agenda. These programs are essential to the survival of millions of Americans in the present while we are trying to build a better world for the future. Mobilized and informed public policy advocacy has an impressive track record of successful defense and incremental improvement of food programs. Several of these programs are entitlements that actually create justiciable rights. The collective procurement associated with school food and other public meal programs creates levers for fundamental food system change. And the network of federal, state and local anti-hunger organizations is potentially a portal through which people can enter the movement for a just food future. Food justice activists should include anti-hunger advocates among their allies and partners.

Keywords: Food assistance; food movement; food regime; food security; food justice; food sovereignty; Supplemental National Assistance Program (SNAP); National School Lunch Program; Good Food Purchasing Program

*Corresponding author: janpoppend@gmail.com

DOI: 10.15353/cfs-rcea.v9i2.534

ISSN: 2292-3071

Introduction

I have spent much of my adult life trying to understand, document, protect, expand, and improve public sector food assistance programs in the United States. I have studied them, written about them, taught courses about them, spoken about them, and served on the boards of NGOs that strive to improve them. I have sent countless letters, emails, texts, and petitions and made numerous phone calls and visits to members of Congress, state legislators, and local officials, trying to prevent legislation that reduces their reach or effectiveness, and promote legislation that increases their support for low-income people. Occasionally, I have marched in the streets or rallied at city hall to promote the same ends. I consider myself a member of the anti-hunger community, variously called the “hunger lobby,” the “anti-hunger movement,” or, as political scientist Peter Eisinger (1998) has labeled it, “The Anti-Hunger Advocacy Group network” (p. 91).

To a non-U.S. and particularly a Canadian audience, such a focus may seem like a perplexing choice for anyone seeking fundamental transformation of the food system in the direction of a just food future. This is a situation, however, in which the US is truly an exception to the norms of social provision that characterize most wealthy, developed nations. Welfare is very nearly gone in the U.S. Only 2.9 million people out of a population of more than 330 million received cash assistance from the Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) program last year (Congressional Research Service, 2022). Another 8.1 million received help from the Supplemental Security Income (SSI) program that serves disabled and elderly persons in need (Social Security Administration, 2019). In contrast, federal food assistance programs served more than 82 million people in the year before the pandemic, about one in four citizens and legal residents of the US. The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) operates fifteen separate food assistance programs. In 2019, the year before the pandemic, these programs represented a total expenditure of \$92.4 billion, approximately two thirds of the USDA’s total budget. (Tiehen, 2020).¹ Although private, charitable food programs like food banks, food pantries, and soup kitchens have captured much public attention, their efforts are dwarfed by public sector food assistance programs such as the National School Lunch Program (NSLP); the School Breakfast Program (SBP); the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), formerly known as Food Stamps; and the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children, commonly known as WIC. SNAP, for example, currently provides nine times the amount of food supplied by the entire Feeding America network of food banks and their affiliated agencies. No wonder these public sector programs have been an important arena of struggle in the US food system.

¹ For an explanation of why food assistance programs in the US have survived while cash welfare assistance has been reduced to the vanishing point, see Poppendieck (2014), especially pp. 296-312.

Typology of food movements

Eric Holt-Giménez and Annie Shattuck (2011) and Holt-Giménez and Wang (2011) have established an analytical framework for the consideration of political and social trends in both corporate food regimes and food movements. This framework characterizes these trends as neoliberal, reformist, progressive, or radical, and identifies each with a specific discourse: food enterprise for the neoliberal, food security for the reformist, food justice for the progressive, and food sovereignty for the radical. In short, they argue that reformist food security policies are a phase of the dominant corporate regime, designed to make minor adjustments to “mitigate the social and environmental externalities of the corporate food regime” (Holt-Giménez & Wang, 2011, pp. 92-93), thus permitting it to retain power and reproduce itself. As Holt-Giménez & Shattuck have summarized (2011, p. 115), “Reformists call for mild reforms to the regime, for example through an increase of social safety nets, consumer-driven niche markets, and voluntary, corporate responsibility mechanisms” At the far end of the spectrum are radical trends associated with food sovereignty and dedicated to dismantling corporate agri-food monopoly power and establishing regionally based, democratized food systems—including agroecologically managed peasant agriculture. Between the two are poised the progressive food justice trends including farmworker and food labor organization, agroecologically produced local food, solidarity economies, land access, and regulated markets and supply. Writing in the aftermath of the Great Recession in the U.S. and the food crisis marked by food riots in the global south, Holt-Giménez & Shattuck (2011) predicted that the capacity of the global food “movement of movements” effectively to confront the current food regime would depend upon whether the organizations in the progressive category made primary alliances with the radical wing, or with the reformists. Only a progressive-radical collaboration, they argue, is likely to bring about serious change.

With that characterization as context, I find myself contemplating the place of anti-hunger advocacy, U.S. style, in a progressive-radical food movement alliance. While many anti-hunger activists think of ourselves as progressives, the food assistance programs to which we have devoted so much energy fit squarely in the reformist category. Is there a place for food assistance monitoring, lobbying, litigation, and legislation in a movement for substantive change in the food regime? This essay presents a case for including the anti-hunger network in the alliances forged by food justice and food sovereignty actors. Because the U.S. has such limited cash welfare, and relies so heavily on food assistance, this argument is largely specific to the United States. Nevertheless, I am heartened by Levkoe and Wilson’s (2022, this issue) characterization of the present moment in Canada’s food movements “as one where food movements are building bridges and connecting silos” (p. 2).

The case for alliance with anti-hunger groups

Survival pending revolution

Thanks to the legacy of the Black Panthers, many radical and progressive activists are familiar with the concept of “Survival Pending Revolution” (Hilliard, 2008; Patel, 2011), the need to work in the here and now to meet basic needs while simultaneously building toward more fundamental or revolutionary change. About 43 million people in the United States currently receive SNAP, often described as the nation’s frontline defense against hunger. In 2018, before the pandemic, nearly one in five SNAP households had no income at all for the month in which the data were collected. Nearly two in five, 38 percent, had incomes *below half* the (already absurdly low) official poverty threshold, a benchmark that demarcates “deep poverty” (USDA, 2019). For these households, SNAP is literally a matter of survival.

School meals also alleviate dire hunger. For some children or their parents, they are simply a convenience, but for a significant subset of children, they are very nearly the only meals they consume on school days. Cafeteria personnel have described how the children in line for school breakfast were different on Mondays, and especially on Tuesdays after a long weekend: “you can tell the hungry kids when they come through the line, how they behave. They are not misbehaving, but they are just...it’s almost like they are grabbing the food...and they will start eating in line” (Poppendieck, 2010, p. 162).

From a moral point of view, therefore, and from an underlying sense of solidarity with poor people, food system revolutionaries active in the U.S. arena cannot afford to ignore these programs. But do they need to involve themselves with the Congressionally focussed anti-hunger organizations that lead the lobbying activities “inside the beltway,” in Washington D.C.? After all, these organizations are widely perceived as compromised by their receipt of funds from and cooperation with food corporations, both manufacturers and retailers—the “unholy alliance” detailed by Andrew Fisher in *Big Hunger* (2017).

Advocacy matters

I am not suggesting that food sovereignty and food justice activists should drop their anti-trust lawsuits and abandon their resistance to land grabs in order to participate in D.C. lobby days in support of SNAP. I *am* arguing that they should continue to sign petitions and join in email and phone campaigns to protect and enhance public food provision and maintain strong alliances with the anti-hunger organizations that lead these efforts. History has shown that food programs do not take care of themselves—eternal vigilance seems to be the price of food assistance. We had food programs for more than three decades before the birth of the hunger lobby amid

shocking revelations in the late 1960s of severe hunger in the nation. These early programs were among our least fair and least effective social provisions. They reached only a modest fraction of those in need—they did not provide sufficient assistance to enable those they did reach to achieve an adequate diet; and they were ridden with inequitable, discriminatory, and humiliating practices (Citizens Board of Inquiry into Hunger and Malnutrition in the United States, 1968; Committee on School Lunch Participation, 1968). Embedded in USDA and the Agriculture committees of Congress, these programs were shaped at every turn to give priority to the needs of the nation’s large-scale commercial farmers (Kotz, 1969; Poppendieck, 2014).

The committees and commissions that revealed the shortcomings of these programs came from a coalition of religious, labor, anti-poverty, and civil rights groups, funded by liberal foundations, and quickly gave rise to a series of dedicated anti-hunger advocacy organizations (Eisinger, 1998; Poppendieck, 2014). Once advocates got involved, they spearheaded a major transformation of food assistance programs. Applying the standard policy evaluation criteria of coverage, adequacy, and equity, food program participation grew enormously as barriers to participation were removed by legislation and litigation, benefits were expanded to reflect an admittedly feeble underlying standard of adequacy, and rights were established to protect against discrimination and abuse. The programs that resulted are still flawed, of course, but they are far better than they were, far better than even the optimists among us thought possible at the outset. Nonetheless, they have required constant care. There is always a faction in American politics that believes that assistance to poor people undermines their desire to work, and combatting this persistent, pernicious trope has required an immense amount of public education and Congressional wrangling. The anti-hunger network led by national lobbying organizations connected to state and local organizations has demonstrated great skill and effectiveness in resisting such attacks and achieving continued expansion of access.

Some of the anti-hunger groups have been doing this work for half a century and almost all of them have been around for decades. They have learned a lot. In their own policy work, food justice organizations can usefully draw on the knowledge, networks, and expertise of anti-hunger organizations. As Wilson and Levkoe (2022, this issue) have urged, we need “proactive efforts to listen to, learn from, and build strategic alliances with a much broader range of actors and organizations” (p.103).

Rights

Overall, the most significant accomplishment of public policy advocacy for food assistance has been the establishment of rights. Unlike the charitable food aid that captures so much of the public food and hunger imaginary, public food programs create justiciable rights enforceable in court. SNAP benefits are available by law to all who are eligible—by law, there is no cap on SNAP spending. Applicants who are turned down are entitled to a legal process called a “Fair

Hearing,” in which they may have legal representation. Until the 1996 welfare reform law—the famous “end of welfare as we know it” promised by Bill Clinton (1991)—SNAP (then called the Food Stamp Program) was available as a matter of right to any citizen or documented non-citizen with income and assets below the eligibility threshold. Despite the U.S. failure to ratify either the United Nations International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights or the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the two documents most used to assert a legal basis for claims of a human right to food, the U.S. did have, in effect, a right to food from 1979 until 1996. It continues to have this right for eligible groups. Almost any sociologist would argue that rights are socially defined—that is defined in human social interactions. They do not exist in the abstract but are created by human beings and human institutions. Rights that are merely asserted, as in “I believe that nutritious food is a human right,” may be of less importance than rights that have been secured by the allocation of resources sufficient to fulfill them.

Procurement

Barbosa and Coca (2022, this issue) stress the importance of state sponsored institutional procurement in “fostering just food futures,” (p. 2) drawing on case studies from Brazil. In the U.S., the national school lunch (NSLP) and breakfast (SBP) programs pay for huge quantities of food procured by local school food authorities in addition to lesser amounts purchased by USDA itself. Procurement favoring local farmers and other producers required successive bouts of Congressional legislation and USDA rule-making to overcome longstanding rules requiring procurement with public funds to accept the lowest bid. Now, however, it is legal for school systems to give preference to local producers, and more do so each year (National Farm to School Network, 2020). The farm to school movement has spawned a more comprehensive revision of public procurement, not only for schools, but for hospitals, jails, daycare, after school programs, and senior centres. A lively movement to encourage municipal governments to adopt the Good Food Purchasing Program (GFPP) pushes public procurement toward alignment with five core values: 1) healthy, nutritious food 2) produced in ways that preserve and protect the environment (including the mitigation of climate change) by 3) a valued workforce covered by adequate occupational health and safety rules and fairly compensated with living wages and comprehensive benefits, with 4) respect for animal welfare, and 5) a priority to invest in and strengthen local economies. While no city has yet achieved full compliance with these core values, many large cities are making progress in establishing standards to move their purchases in the GFPP direction, and school food has been the arena with the largest purchases and the greatest progress (Lo and Delwiche, 2016. Center for Good Food Purchasing, 2022). There has been a fundamental change in the culture of public procurement. With active food justice input, local food procurement can become a powerful tool for support of new entrants to agriculture, especially BIPOC and immigrant farmers. That is, public food assistance programs in the U.S.

have opened strategic paths for the progressive and radical wings of the food movement. A robust alliance, for example, might push the GFPP toward the addition of an explicit racial equity lens.

GFPP is currently being applied to those programs that provide actual meals: school meals (NSLP and SBP), the Summer Meals Program, the Child and Adult Care Food Program, and congregate and home delivered meals for seniors. The movement for its expansion is organized at the municipal level. With sufficient advocacy, however, its principles could be applied at the national level to at least four other U.S. food assistance programs: the Commodity Supplemental Food Program, the Food Distribution Program on Indian Reservations, The Emergency Food Assistance Program, and the Farm to Families Food Box program that was created to respond to the elevated need and supply chain disruptions of the COVID-19 pandemic. Similarly, food banks, which increasingly raise money and purchase foods in addition to receiving food donations, could apply GFPP principles to their own food purchases.

Private household procurement is less susceptible to regulation, but a number of incentive programs at the federal, state, and municipal levels have tried to direct SNAP and WIC expenditures toward locally produced healthy foods. The WIC Farmers Market Program provides WIC household with modest vouchers for use at farmers markets, and arrangements like the Massachusetts' Healthy Incentives Program and New York City Health Bucks add purchasing power to SNAP households for purchase of locally grown fruits and vegetables at farmers markets and farmstands.

Potential allies

Large numbers of people and many organizations are involved in anti-hunger advocacy, and such engagement is potentially a portal to the progressive and radical agendas of the food movement. When I taught undergraduate courses on the food system in the first decade of this century, many of my students had first become aware of food issues through high school canned food drives to support local food pantries. Some of them stayed stuck in the charitable food paradigm, but others went on to embrace food labor issues and opposition to corporate control of the food system. No one is born with a full-fledged analysis of the capitalist food regime; people learn from each other as they become engaged. I have watched with great interest as a subset of food bankers in the U.S. has embraced a more progressive agenda, trying to move from what they call “feeding the need” to “shortening the lines.” If food justice and food sovereignty proponents fail to engage with people who have already exhibited concern about inequality and hunger, where will they find the new recruits they will need to achieve their ambitious agenda? Further, food programs involve literally millions of participants in the roles of guest, recipient, and eater. These are experts by experience, and food movement organizations and scholars are paying increasing attention to the importance of involving them in decision making (Klassen et al.,

2022, this issue; Tung et al., 2022, this issue; Vibert et al., 2022, this issue). Ironically, this has proven easier for charitable organizations and other non-profits than for public agencies, but gradually demands for inclusion are being made upon public entities. For example, food non-profits have begun organizing high school and middle school students to advocate for better school food. The radical and progressive food movement leaders of the future may be serving on high school food advisory councils or college campus food security boards today.

The effort to involve the end users of food programs in policy advocacy and political action bring us full circle to the importance of using what we have at hand to meet immediate needs to liberate people to participate in more fundamental struggles (i.e., “survival pending revolution”). As Power and McBay (2022, this issue) have written of Basic Income, food assistance can “facilitate the participation of those currently marginalized...it can provide the freedom from want, scarcity, and desperation that is essential to imagine and struggle for more just ways of living together on the planet” (pp. 3–4).

Reflections on the pandemic

The COVID-19 pandemic has both revealed and intensified the inherent inequities of the corporate food regime. As one astute observer recently put it, pandemic lockdowns “divide those who must stay out in the world, picking tomatoes and restocking grocery shelves, and those with the luxury of sheltering at home to await their contactless deliveries” (Mishan, 2021, p. 121). The pandemic has shone a spotlight on workers all along the food chain, now deemed “essential” but previously invisible to many: “For those seeking change in the world of food...that represents an opportunity: to reach out to a public newly (if belatedly) awakened to the urgencies of our time—the chasm between rich and poor, racial inequity and environmental degradation—all of which were with us before the pandemic and will, without systemic change, outlast it” (Mishan, 2021, p. 121).

Food assistance has played a complex role. The expansion of public sector food assistance in the U.S. has been substantial, even dramatic, including a temporary rise in SNAP benefit levels, conversion of school meals to a universal free basis, and a cash benefit to replace lost school meals called Pandemic-EBT. (USDA, 2021; Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, 2021). Nevertheless, what has captured public attention and raised consciousness are the mediagenic lines of cars at food banks, and the poignant interviews with food bank first timers. “This is a renaissance for food banks” one food bank CEO said at a recent online roundtable. He continued, “There is such a spike in appreciation among people for whom food banks were not on their radar. Now they really appreciate who we are and what we do” (Food Bank News, 2020 paragraph 5). I worry that the newly awakened concern about food inequality will be captured by food banks instead of food rights.

I believe that it is urgent that progressives in the U.S. harness the new social solidarity potential of the pandemic, not only for long term transformation, but in the immediate present for fairer, more generous, more inclusive public sector food and income programs. Food banks cannot create rights. Kind and gentle though they may sometimes be, they are still “emergency” measures to fill in the gaps left by inadequacies in wages, employment, and public income maintenance and food assistance programs (Poppendieck, 1998). Some may transform themselves into the sorts of comprehensive food centres active in Canada (Saul & Curtis, 2013; Habib, this issue), but in the U.S. context, we need to put concentrated energy into revitalizing and shoring up the public sector provisions that can and do confer rights. Two opportunities are urgent: First, the Thrifty Food Plan upon which SNAP benefit allotments are based has recently been revised toward a more adequate standard, but benefit levels in the plan are adjusted for inflation only once per year. This means that they are always lagging behind reality, and in periods of rapid food price escalation, the lag can be substantial. Food justice activists need to weigh in, loud and clear, in favor of a standard, adjusted quarterly, that would be sufficient to permit SNAP households to access fresh, healthy, and locally grown foods. Second, advocates are gearing up for a fight for universal free school meals. Since these programs are so essential to the survival of low-income households, we cannot afford to miss the moment of heightened concern and consciousness created by the shared experience of the pandemic. Food justice activists should lend their considerable moral force and organizing skills to these fights to expand rights to food.

Acknowledgements: The author wishes to thank the organizers and participants of the Just Food Futures workshop for their attentive reading, lively discussion, and preliminary editing, as well as the anonymous reviewers and skilled staff of *Canadian Food Studies / La Revue Canadienne des études sur l'alimentation*.

References

- Barbosa Jr, R., & Coca, E. (2022). Enacting just food futures through the state: evidence from Brazil. *Canadian Food Studies / La Revue Canadienne des études sur l'alimentation* 9(2), 75-100. <https://doi.org/10.15353/cfs-rcea.v9i2.540>
- Center for Good Food Purchasing, (2022) <https://goodfoodpurchasing.org/stories/>
- Center on Budget and Policy Priorities. (2021). *States are using much-needed temporary flexibility in SNAP to respond to COVID-19 challenges*. <https://www.cbpp.org/sites/default/files/atoms/files/3-31-20fa.pdf>
- Citizens Board of Inquiry into Hunger and Malnutrition in the United States. (1968). *Hunger USA*. Beacon Press.

- Clinton, W. “The new covenant: address to the students at Georgetown University,” October 23, 1991. www.dlcppi.org/speeches/91newcov.htm
- Committee on School Lunch Participation. (1968). *Their daily bread: A study of the National School Lunch Program*. McNelley-Rudd Printing Service, Inc.
- Congressional Research Service. (2022). *The temporary assistance for needy families block grant: Responses to frequently asked questions*. <https://fas.org/sgp/crs/misc/RL32760.pdf>
- Eisinger, P. (1998). *Toward an end to hunger in America*. Brookings Institution Press.
- Fisher, A. (2017). *Big hunger: The unholy alliance between corporate America and anti-hunger groups*. MIT Press.
- Food Bank News. (November 17, 2020). CEO roundtable: hunger is not a food problem. <https://foodbanknews.org/ceo-roundtable-hunger-is-not-a-food-problem/>
- Habib, S. (2022). Opportunity in crisis: shifting public will to transform food systems. *Canadian Food Studies / La Revue Canadienne des études sur l'alimentation* 9(2), 64-74. <https://doi.org/10.15353/cfs-rcea.v9i2.538>
- Hilliard, D. (Ed.). (2008). *The Black Panther Party service to the people programs*. University of New Mexico Press.
- Holt-Giménez, E., & Shattuck, A. (2011). Food crises, food regimes and food movements: rumblings of reform or tides of transformation? *The Journal of Peasant Studies*, 38(1), 109-144. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03066150.2010.538578>
- Holt-Giménez, E., & Wang, Y. (2011). Reform or transformation: the pivotal role of food justice in the U.S. food movement. *Race/Ethnicity: Multidisciplinary Global Contexts*, 5(1), 88-102. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.2979/racethmulglocon.5.1.83>
- Klassen, S., Migrante, F., & Wittman, H. (2022). Sharing the struggle for fairness: exploring the possibilities for solidarity & just labour in organic agriculture. *Canadian Food Studies / La Revue Canadienne des études sur l'alimentation* 9(2), 147-179. <https://doi.org/10.15353/cfs-rcea.v9i2.536>
- Kotz, N. (1969). *Let them eat promises; The politics of hunger in America*. Prentice Hall.
- Lo, J. & Delwiche, A. (2016). The good food purchasing policy: a tool to intertwine worker justice with a sustainable food system. *Journal of Agriculture, Food Systems, and Community Development* 6, 185-194.
- Mishan, L. (2021, February 21) The activists working to remake the food system, *T: The New York Times Style Magazine*. <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/02/19/t-magazine/food-security-activists.html>
- National Farm to School network. (2020, May 19). The benefits of farm to school. <http://www.farmentoschool.org/Resources/BenefitsFactSheet.pdf>
- Patel, R. (2011). Survival pending revolution: What the Black Panthers can teach the U.S. food movement. In E. Holt-Gimenez (Ed.), *Food movements unite! Strategies to transform our food systems* (pp. 115-135). Food First Books.

- Poppendieck, J. (1998). *Sweet charity? Emergency food and the end of entitlement*. Viking Books.
- Poppendieck, J. (2010). *Free for all: Fixing school food in America*. University of California Press.
- Poppendieck, J. (2014). *Breadlines knee-deep in wheat: Food assistance in the great depression*. University of California Press.
- Power, E., & McBay, M. (2022). An unconditional basic income is necessary but insufficient to transform towards just food futures. *Canadian Food Studies / La Revue Canadienne Des Études Sur l'alimentation* 9(2), 31-37. <https://doi.org/10.15353/cfs-rcea.v9i2.533>
- Saul, N., & Curtis, A. (2013). *The Stop: How the fight for good food transformed a community and inspired a movement*. Melville House.
- Social Security Administration. (2019). *SSI Annual Statistical Report, 2019*. Research, statistics & policy analysis. https://www.ssa.gov/policy/docs/statcomps/ssi_asr/
- Tiehen, L. (2020). *The food assistance landscape: Fiscal year 2019 annual report*. U.S. Department of Agriculture. <https://www.ers.usda.gov/webdocs/publications/99026/eib-218.pdf?v=1277.5>
- Tung, A., Redwood, R. R., & Cloutier, D. (2022). Breadlines, victory gardens, or human rights?: examining food insecurity discourses in Canada. *Canadian Food Studies / La Revue Canadienne des études sur l'alimentation* 9(2), 249-276. <https://doi.org/10.15353/cfs-rcea.v9i2.530>
- United States Department of Agriculture (USDA). (2019, November). *Characteristics of supplemental nutrition assistance program households: Fiscal year 2018 (Summary)*. Food and nutrition service. <https://fns-prod.azureedge.us/sites/default/files/resource-files/Characteristics2018-Summary.pdf>
- United States Department of Agriculture (USDA). (2021) *SNAP data tables*. <https://fns-prod.azureedge.us/sites/default/files/resource-files/34SNAPmonthly-6.pdf>
- Vibert, E., Gill, B., Murphy, M., Pérez Piñánd, A., & Puerta Silva, C. (2022). Transformation or the next meal? Global-local tensions in food justice work *Canadian Food Studies / La Revue Canadienne des études sur l'alimentation* 9(2), 226-248. <https://doi.org/10.15353/cfs-rcea.v9i2.531>
- Wilson, A., & Levkoe, C. Z. (2022). Introspecting food movements in Canada: Unpacking tensions towards justice and sustainability. *Canadian Food Studies / La Revue Canadienne Des Études Sur l'alimentation* 9(2), 101-124. <https://doi.org/10.15353/cfs-rcea.v9i2.524>



Narrative

The community food centre: Using relational spaces to transform deep stories and shift public will

Syma Habib*

Community Food Centres Canada

Abstract

COVID-19 has revealed deep inequities in our food system. As goodwill and charity from this crisis disappears, and emergency supports begin to dwindle, we can anticipate increased food insecurity amongst Canadians. Rising food prices and unemployment will drive a lack of access to fresh nutritious foods for already stressed and vulnerable individuals.

As a community organizer who has advocated for poverty reduction and food justice over my lifetime, I understand the short-lived nature of change that occurs without public will and engagement - policy wins end up being removed in the next election cycle. My experience with party-dependent advocacy projects has led me to ask the question: how do we build the kind of public will that demands access to healthy and nutritious food as not an individual responsibility but a public duty, much like universal healthcare?

In writing this paper I intend to draw upon my experiences in organizing to explore the deeper cultural and internal shifts that may need to occur to inspire public will and create change that lasts beyond a single election cycle, and the opportunity that COVID-19 presents as Canadians grapple with questions about food security and poverty in an unprecedented time. I will connect with three community members I advocated with in my time doing placebased community organizing, all with different experiences of food insecurity, and use a storytelling approach to imagine a more effective way of advocating for just food futures.

*Corresponding author: syma.habib@gmail.com

DOI: 10.15353/cfs-rcea.v9i2.538

ISSN: 2292-3071

Keywords: Food justice; food security; poverty reduction; community development; grassroots organizing; community organizing; decolonizing food systems; Indigenous food systems; advocacy; public will

Introduction

To tell a story appropriately, my Indigenous friends and elders have taught me to always ground the reader or listener in the reality I emerge from. *Salam* (peace), my name is Syma. I am Punjabi, descended from ancestors who lived in agriculturally-based communities in the Indian sub-continent, in an area located in what is now known as Pakistan. I was born and raised on Treaty 6—the traditional lands of First Nations, Metis, and Inuit people in what is now known as Edmonton, Canada. For my entire life, I have had one foot planted in the radical collectivism that my ancestral culture fosters and the other in the expressive individualism of the dominant culture. This bi-cultural experience has long fostered my curiosity about deep stories: the metaphors and assumed truths that shape how people view relationships, accountability, and responsibility.

For many years now, food has been at the center of my exploration of deep stories, and I come by my activism in this realm honestly. Growing up, good food was valued above all else in my home. I was raised on a traditional diet of foods that were slow-cooked, sprouted, fermented, and made from scratch. I now know what an immense privilege that was (although back then I would have traded anything for the popular cookie and frosting recess snack of Dunkaroos to fit in with my peers)! I helped butcher my first chicken when I was eight, happily grew carrots to share with our neighbours, and helped my mother as she prepared delicious dinners for family friends. Even though family health crises shifted us from being a working-class home to one that often struggled to make ends meet, my mother always knew how to feed a crowd and build a community around nourishment. My father would often proudly declare, “you might not have toys or nice shoes, but I will always make sure you’ve got good food in your bellies.”

In my late teens, I found myself living alone, going to university full time while working thirty hours a week at a minimum wage job and scraping by. I turned to cheap subsistence foods to make up for the time poverty and temporary financial poverty I was experiencing, and in the years that followed I was diagnosed with a chronic illness. My pathway back to health was grounded in turning back to my traditional foods—cooking with nutrient-dense ingredients, soaking and sprouting grains and lentils, using all parts of the animal, and using plenty of warming spices. My body healed, my mental health improved, and I was shocked at how these changes so quickly impacted my ability to thrive. As I was clumsily learning to cook the foods my mother prepared so effortlessly, I worked with marginalized youth who faced their own mental and physical health challenges. With the hubris that only a young woman in her early 20s

could have, I set out to “save” these youth, believing that if only they knew how to eat well all their problems would be solved.

This was my first foray into the complex intersectional experience of food insecurity. My experience as a broke university student from a family that fell onto hard times was very different than the intergenerational poverty of a young Indigenous trans man I worked with, who was living in care on a fixed income, disconnected from his food traditions and sense of autonomy. As I worked over the years with many different communities considered “barriered,” I came to realize that the people I supported had similar relationships to food as many of my friends, mentors, and the general population. Most people I knew were disconnected from food sources, lacked basic food preparation skills, and had a palate geared toward ultra-processed foods, even if they were not considered marginalized. More often, it seemed that what really kept the people I worked with from being able to access nourishing food was income and barriers related to income. A person living on disability benefits might know how to make a smoothie, but how can they make that smoothie at home when the nearest grocery store is a forty-five minute bus ride away, they can’t afford transit, a bulk bag of frozen berries costs a quarter of their grocery budget for the month, and seventy percent of their monthly income is spent on rent so that they can’t afford a blender?

My work in community has taught me two things; first, food is a profound modality for whole health and belonging that every person deserves to have full access to, regardless of income. Second, a charitable approach to food insecurity is insufficient without a commitment to economic justice. As an advocate and community organizer, I believe that policy change focused on poverty reduction is fundamental to create thriving, food-secure communities. I have supported policy initiatives connected to tax reform, social assistance indexing, and Universal Basic Income. However, policy without public will is subject to the whims of the party in power, as I have learned by witnessing the success and subsequent removal, without any uproar, of many initiatives that put food on people’s tables. Public will, as I understand it, is the way individuals in a nation or community perceive an idea that impacts them collectively, and their sense of agency in being able to affect the realization of that idea. These ideas could be as simple as reducing the speed limit on a street where children play, or as complex as universal healthcare. Public will has the potential to radically inform political will. It requires citizens to feel that they are valuable in a democratic system, to be able to imagine possibilities beyond the realm of their current reality, and to have the tools to actively participate in advocating for the realization of their vision. My experiences witnessing policy initiatives so blithely removed at the turn of an election cycle has led me to ask the question: what does it take to build the kind of public will that holds that every person is entitled to good food in the same way that they are entitled to universal healthcare here in Canada?

In the remainder of this paper, I propose two methods for creating this public will: first, to fundamentally shift a deep story of how we understand food insecurity and to move from a transactional charitable model to one that is rooted in community, solidarity, relationship, and equity. The second method is to create spaces for this deep story to flourish through relational

activism. I use a storytelling approach and draw upon my experiences doing this kind of relational work in a progressive food movement that strives for economic justice. I also offer the perspectives of three visionary activists I worked alongside during that time. They have consented to their names and words being used. From their stories emerge an ethos of mutual aid and interconnectedness that shapes their bigger-picture activism, and it is this relationality that I believe is key to transforming our food systems from the bottom up.

From 2016 to 2019 I had the great pleasure of being on the founding team of The Alex Community Food Centre (CFC) in Calgary, Canada. It is part of a growing network of community food centres across the country, and it is a beautiful and dignified space that focuses on increasing access to nutritious food, providing cooking and gardening classes for people to learn and share their skills, and advocating for change at a systems level to make good food easily available for all. The Alex CFC is unique in its approach—every aspect of the space was designed first and foremost with dignity, belonging, and community in mind. From the welcoming Nordic-inspired design of the building to the seated meal service, or the bright coffee station where neighbours can fill up one of the many charming, mismatched mugs, it is a place that encourages people to sit down, slow down, and connect. Volunteers and people accessing services are all called community members, and a concerted effort is made to level the power dynamic between these groups.

The deep stories about food insecurity in this culture are often embedded within the responsibility and moral failure of a person living at or below the poverty line. We are often able to pass judgement from afar on people experiencing poverty, or, if we feel compelled to help in some way, it is often through a lens of charity. At The Alex CFC, I watched as the design of the space and programming transformed many people who came in as volunteers, intent on “helping,” into allies focused on understanding and solidarity. This is not to romanticize or gloss over the very real power dynamics that still existed—economic privilege, colonialism, racism, heteronormativity, and patriarchal values were things we struggled with every day—but, as volunteers and community members built relationships that were grounded in sharing meals and stories together, it became harder for those who were more economically privileged in our community to see people experiencing poverty as moral failures. Instead, I watched as honest conversations led to volunteers going on the very same journey that I had in my own understanding of food justice—realizing that for many the road to eating well is fraught with unimaginable obstacles, and that not being able to easily access nutritious food further entrenches these obstacles. This understanding was fundamental in facilitating a major paradigm shift for many of these volunteers, increasing their desire to support advocacy initiatives that focused on income security rather than merely a charitable approach to food security.

The community I worked alongside frequently commented on the stark contrast between their experiences in traditional food charity spaces and their experience at a food centre. Poverty can be a deeply isolating experience, and in that isolation some people internalized the idea that their food insecurity was a shameful personal defect, rather than a structural failure. Many times over, I witnessed how community, camaraderie, and conversation supported movement out of

that shame, sometimes resulting in a desire to take part in community advocacy. For some, disempowerment and shame about their own experience of poverty stifled their sense of agency around shifting systems. Sharing meals and building relationships with peers who were activists working on poverty reduction initiatives facilitated a shift in that story, and supported them in recognizing that their lived experiences were vitally important in shaping and forming government policy.

To enter a community food centre is to momentarily live in a reality that values dignified nutritious food access as a basic human right, without the humiliating dance of means-testing, lines, dented cans, and wilted produce. I believe this embodied experience of a different way of approaching food has the power to change a person's deep story about the food system, as people begin to recognize the power of food to transform community health. Their story about the food system changes, and, as it does, the idea that every person deserves equitable access to food in the same way that every person deserves equitable access to healthcare begins to germinate.

I have rarely encountered a Canadian who believes that universal healthcare is unnecessary. It is a source of pride for people who live here. The belief that people deserve adequate, free access to quality healthcare emerges from a deep story our culture holds about the collective good that such a service provides. Our ability to recognize healthcare as a basic human right means that, regardless of where people sit on the political spectrum, we have collectively agreed to resource this basic human right in order to ensure the health of everyone. In my time at The Alex CFC, I witnessed many community members recognize the collective good that access to fresh, nourishing food provides, and, in turn, I saw the public will of our tiny community shift toward the belief that food should be a basic human right. Participating in this different reality allowed all community members to understand why the current system is failing us, and to feel emboldened to believe in a different vision. I believe that facilitating spaces to create these shifts in public will across income levels and lived experiences is a powerful way to build a sustainable movement. When a critical mass of people can see how and why food security and economic justice are beneficial, not just to individuals but also to our collective well-being, our public will has the power to shape political will to create long-term change that does not shift based on the party in power.

This perspective, focused on community, solidarity, relationship, and equity, was embodied by many community leaders and advocates in the space. Tracy Ray, Dion, and Julie are some of those leaders. I connected with them during two separate conversations in 2020 to talk about how to shift public will around complex policy issues. We connected over our shared deep stories and how we believe those deep stories shape public will. They all stressed that what we do matters much less than the why and the how. The following is what they offered.

The Story of the Circle: Interviewee #1 and Interviewee #2

“There’s a point at which, from a poverty angle, eating “bad food” becomes a huge distal stressor – by [distal] I mean people know they should eat healthier and can’t buy good food, so they settle for less. It’s in your mind and it’s a constant worry, and you have to live in poverty to understand what that worry feels like. You’re constantly rationalizing the choices you’re making. If the general public understood that these were the mental processes people go through every day, they would never put up with this shit. They would never allow governments to not help people.” Tracy Ray

Tracy Ray and Dion are both committed to empowering their communities with traditional Blackfoot, Metis, and Cree teachings. Tracy Ray is a fierce community advocate, with lived experience of poverty and a keen sense of justice and intellect. Her levity and gentle sense of humor make her a powerful activist. Dion is a skilled facilitator, who brings care and compassion to her work with Indigenous mothers and community members as the Indigenous Program Coordinator at The Alex CFC.

My conversation with these two community leaders was grounded in the deep story of their traditions of radical interconnectedness, where food possesses life force and humans are not separate from this life force when consuming it. Instead, we are part of a circle, a cycle of life that continues to perpetuate abundance. This circle is baked into the ontological design of traditional communities—from the medicine wheel to the way that people feast together, in a large circle, hearts to the fire. The circle speaks to the value of removing hierarchy—there is no head in a circle, and instead respect and priority are focused upon the knowledge keepers and the elders. To this day, Dion and Tracy Ray keep the tradition of the circle alive when they gather with others.

The circle is grounded in values of, as Dion put it, “kindness, caring, and sharing”—a view of the world that is fundamentally based upon living relationally rather than in transaction with one another. This was the point that Dion and Tracy Ray stressed to me repeatedly as we discussed advocacy. Unless we retrain our minds and hearts to view life’s work as connection in relation to others, we will not make progress on any pressing social issues, least of all hunger. Both were hesitant to name any singular root cause of an unjust food system—their worldview is based in complexity rather than in black and white thinking—but both also agreed that, if pressed to name one root cause in our current context, it would be the disintegration of relationship.

As our conversation turned to advocacy and systems level changes, Tracy Ray offered this reflection:

Everybody needs food every day. When you start having an issue with this necessity, this is where isolation begins. Now you’ve gotta find food instead of participating, or you gotta stay home because you don’t have enough energy or enough food to share. When you’re isolated, people start speaking for you, you automatically start losing your voice right

there from the first time you are a little bit food insecure. You start not being able to do what other people can do, who have had their basic right of being fed met. We have to at least start to solve at the basic needs level, especially food – it’s one of the most unnecessary problems in society, and it could barely even exist in a traditional Indigenous society unless there was a great natural disaster. And even if there was, people would share harder.

As we discussed proposed poverty-reduction policy solutions, such as Universal Basic Income, adjustments to income support, or tax reform (which Dion and Tracy Ray are both familiar with and have advocated for), there was agreement that Indigenous worldviews support and encourage a robust social safety net. Resources were never meant to be hoarded, and anything that serves as medicine for a people, whether it be food, housing, or money, is always meant to flow freely. This mindset of abundance and trust is part of the story of the circle. Our challenge, they said, was honoring these tried and tested ways of being and offering abundance to everyone.

The Story of *Barangay* and *Kapwa*: Interviewee #3

“*Kapwa* is how we relate to each other. Tagalog is contextual, the “thing” is defined by others surrounding “it.” English is individualistic, the opposite. *Kapwa* is what we call each other but we are not ever alone, we are always together with others. *Kapwa* are folks in our community who are also part of our closer community circles. *Kapwa* is a concept that we use to describe our community’s unique virtues, I guess. It is part of mutual obligation of togetherness.” (Julie)

Julie’s Filipinx roots profoundly inform her involvement in social causes. She is a powerful advocate for food justice in this city, and when I first met her we bonded over our shared desire to leverage the buying power of communities to purchase nutritious whole foods in bulk. When we connected to chat, it was not surprising that there was a deep story of the notion of mutuality in our conversation; as she mentions above, the linguistics of her traditional culture make it difficult for her to conceive of the world in any other way. From the deep story of *Kapwa* emerges the model of *Barangay*, a social structure that fosters a sense of accountability to one another by creating small, interdependent units of community.

Although the notion of *Kapwa* runs strong even among the diaspora, Julie reflected that the Filipinx relationship with food has been profoundly impacted by Spanish colonization. The majority of the Filipinx diaspora is twice removed from the land—first through urbanization in their home country, and then through the process of migration. When people gather, it is not so much about the food traditions as it is about the spirit of togetherness and community that persists in spite of colonization and displacement.

An avid urban vegetable gardener, Julie grew an abundance of produce in her front yard in the summer of 2020. When her community group came to visit outdoors, she would educate them on how to use greens that grow in this climate in traditional dishes. She reflected with laughter that, when she sent people home with these greens, they would proceed to split the bounty with their own friends and family. In her community, nothing is “mine,” and this philosophy extends to more than just food—goods flow freely between households within the social contract of *Barangay*.

As a person who has been a passionate advocate for food and income security, Julie reflects that something feels fundamentally missing from the fabric of the broader Canadian support system:

You go here for your food, you go here for your clothing, let’s spend all day travelling to go talk to someone else about this. You don’t know any of the people you encountered and spend so much time trying to meet your needs that you don’t have time or energy for anything else.... In *Barangay*, everyone has a role and takes care of each other. We ask ourselves: who’s not here? Who’s not eating? Whose kid needs shoes? Then we invite them over, we feed them, we give their kid a pair of shoes...and we never expect anything in return. There is no tit-for-tat.

For Julie, *Barangay* relieves the crushing pressure of individualism in the dominant culture, and it is a value she tries to foster not just in her ethnocultural community, but in her neighbourhood as well. Success, for her, looks like creating opportunities for generosity with her neighbours, where the stress of keeping score is removed, and people share without pressure.

Barangay and its fundamental principle of *Kapwa* have been critical in mobilizing Julie’s Filipinx community on a number of crucial advocacy issues, and have supported complex community conversations about LGBTQ+ rights, youth mental health, and so much more. The value of mutuality has allowed for the complexity and messiness of being in relationship. When I asked Julie what role her traditional deep stories have to play in advocacy, she reflected to me that advocacy work in many activist circles often seems transactional: people are asked to sign a petition, come to this rally, or write to their MLA. There is a quality of relationship that she observes as missing from civic engagement and advocacy work. What would happen, she wonders, if we started first with a meal shared or a garden grown together? Julie believes that the very nature of civic engagement would change if the value of *Kapwa* was the soil from which public will grew.

Conclusion

In speaking with Julie, Dion, and Tracy Ray, I was struck by the commonalities in both conversations, especially the call for doing advocacy work from a foundation of trust and relationship and moving away from transaction. I can attest to the power of this relational method. When I worked at The Alex CFC, much of my work was focused on community advocacy, and for three years I worked alongside community members and facilitated training for community organizing with people who had lived experience of poverty. We worked to strengthen a network of basic income advocacy in our province, increase voter turnout in the community, and engage local politicians around the issue of food insecurity. We built relationships with each other and did the work while laughing over a meal or digging up carrots in the garden. If I had been an outsider, bringing in petitions or proposing letter-writing campaigns without first getting to know the community, I would have been laughed out the door!

Our activism at The Alex CFC was rooted in relationship. Because of this, we knew what made it difficult for people to participate in advocacy work, and we worked to alleviate those barriers. Children were welcome, and there was a room for them to play and often a volunteer to provide childcare, bus tickets were available for those who needed them, and there was always a warm meal to eat as we worked on community action. This accessible, relational way of doing activism work meant that the community could work on advocacy related to food and economic justice through more traditional activism, as well as through artistic endeavors like spoken word poetry, visual art, storytelling, and, in the case of a very motivated group of teenagers, a hip hop music video that demonstrated the power of solidarity over charity (What Feeds Us YYC, 2017). I learned through my work that, as a person's deep story about food justice changes, it's important to have a place and a plan to channel the energy that comes with that paradigm shift. Facilitating a space that focuses on building a community of people intent on creating change did two things: it created an infectious energy that more people wanted to be a part of, and it built relationships and peer support that helped people realize that they were not alone in wanting these changes. This was the foundation of our justice work, and although I no longer work at The Alex CFC it delights me to see that the relationships and spirit of activism are still strong in community members, who call to check in and offer each other mutual aid as the COVID-19 pandemic rages on. I am confident that, as the urgency of this crisis abates, this community of activists will continue their big-picture poverty reduction work.

The isolation of the COVID-19 pandemic has taught us about what happens when our notion of community disintegrates, and we are left to handle crisis alone. However, having worked for so many years to facilitate communities of radical belonging, I see opportunity in this crisis. We are being forced to confront the myth of extreme individualism, recognizing the interconnectedness of our health as we try to fight a virus that thrives on the inequity of our structures. The deep stories that we hold as a culture are capable of shifting and changing. My conversations with Julie, Dion, and Tracy Ray reflected a hopefulness that COVID-19's

magnifying glass on the ramifications of structural inequalities will change our deep stories about collective responsibility and mutuality. As food insecurity continues to grow because of increased income insecurity, we simply no longer have a choice. We also have a long road ahead of us. Charitable food systems make for more heartwarming news stories than activism around tax credits, indexing income support to inflation, and adequately resourcing people so that they can feed each other instead of relying on food banks. Over the course of this pandemic, increased reliance on emergency food access, while important, has been a distraction from the greater inequities that foster this reliance to begin with. It is more important now than ever to build relationships in spaces that challenge the charitable paradigm and shift our deep story about food systems to one of solidarity—one where a person’s ability to eat is not predicated upon the mercy of another.

As we work towards a just food future, whether we are academics, frontline workers, farmers, researchers, chefs, or advocates, I believe we need to start asking ourselves: how might we facilitate a shift in the deep stories about food insecurity that we hold in ourselves and allow to exist in our institutions? How do we create relational activist spaces that allow for our work to come from a place of radical solidarity, mutuality, interconnectedness, and care? How do we learn from the traditions and cultures that still hold onto these values so that we can move beyond our own cultural paradigm of transaction?

Dion, Julie, and Tracy Ray might argue that the entire structural transformation starts and ends with food. It starts with sharing meals in a circle, building relationships with people we view as other, and finding our sense of togetherness—the *Kapwa*. It continues in our social contract of community care—growing and cooking food to share and building strong and robust ways of checking in on each other that reduce dependence on charity and create a sense of collective duty and responsibility for each other. It ends with diverse communities of people of all socioeconomic backgrounds recognizing that a robust and dignified food system is not just nice to have, it is necessary for public health, and we are obligated to invest in and support every community in building the appropriate structures for this to happen. My experiences of what Dion, Julie, and Tracy Ray offered to the community at The Alex CFC affirms this approach. Public will shifts as we are able to see and imagine a different way of being in the world. Places like The Alex CFC, that both embody a vision of a food system rooted in justice and solidarity and provide space to bring more people into the vision through activism and advocacy, will lead the transformation of the food system that we seek.

Acknowledgements:

I am so grateful to Julie, Tracy Ray and Dion in particular, for offering me their time in the midst of an unfathomably stressful time (the height of the COVID-19 pandemic) to have generative, beautiful and hopeful conversation. All my gratitude to Ammi and Abba for connecting me to the sacred power of food when I was a little one.

References

What Feeds Us YYC. (2017, October 2). *Plant the Seed* [Video]. Youtube.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Mns-Gm4KTKY>



Original Research Article

Enacting just food futures through the state: Evidence from BrazilRicardo Barbosa, Jr.^{a*} and Estevan Coca^b^a University of Calgary^b Federal University of Alfnas

Abstract

The state is an important, if sometimes overlooked, terrain of struggle for food activists. To explore the ways and extent to which just food futures can be enacted through the state, we present the experience of Brazil. We argue that activists should seek to advance food policies that have broad social appeal to weather political changes in administrations. Our argument is informed by an extensive review of scholarship on the state, corporate influence, and the possibility of promoting progressive agri-food change through the state, as well as the contradictions of doing so. Drawing on (agrarian) political economy we analyze institutional procurement as exemplifying the state's role not only in “stabilizing” and “growing” the economy but also in enacting “redistribution”. Through our research in Brazil, we compare how the Food Acquisition Program (PAA) and the National School Meal Program (PNAE) have been impacted by the far-right's rise to power since 2016. When mobilizing the power of institutions to change food systems by leveraging the purchasing power of the state, beyond institutionalization, food policies must be participatory and framed as collective gains for society more broadly, rather than for specific social groups. This would keep such policies from becoming the target of competing administrations, as evidenced by the Brazil case.

Keywords: Brazil; food and agriculture; institutional procurement, (agrarian) political economy; the state

*Corresponding author: ribarbosajr@gmail.com

DOI: 10.15353/cfs-rcea.v9i2.540

ISSN: 2292-3071

Introduction

The ascension of far-right authoritarian populists across the globe (Scoones et al., 2018) has made neoliberal capitalism even more predatory (Sassen, 2010, 2015; Dunlap & Jakobsen, 2020). The Green New Deal (Ocasio-Cortez, 2019) and analog proposals have emerged as a response, with the potential to radically change the ways we think about food and agriculture (Selwyn, 2021). These new pacts reassert the state's role in promoting progressive social and environmental change.¹ In this paper, we draw attention to the ways and extent to which just food futures (Rosol et al., 2022, this issue) can be enacted through the state. In investigating different perspectives of state-society relations, we highlight how states are built and govern through disputes (Lund, 2016; for more see section 3.1). This conception guides our analysis of institutional procurement by recognizing how “the state” refers to specific political institutions that are relevant to food policy making and implementation in the Brazil context, but also how such spaces are arenas for dispute from which we can mobilize towards just food futures across geographies.

Recent food activism and scholarship in the global North has focussed on the centrality of the state unevenly, at times ignoring experiences in which civil society pursues food system transformation through the state (e.g., Koc et al., 2008). Across North America, hunger rights activists have engaged extensively with the state (Himmelgreen & Romero-Daza, 2010; Poppendieck, 2022, this issue). In Canada, for instance, food policy councils are on the rise, demands for the right to food increase, Food Security Canada has become focussed on national Canadian food policy, and the National Farmers Union has long lobbied the state as a key agent of change (National Farmers Union, 2013; Levkoe & Sheedy, 2019). Even Indigenous food sovereignty activists have underlined the important role the state plays in short term solutions (Kepkiewicz & Rotz, 2018). Recent literature has also called for greater engagement with, and more focus on, the state and governance and has critiqued certain elements of food movements for not sufficiently engaging with the state (Desmarais et al., 2017; Andrée et al., 2019). Examples include: Rod MacRae's (2011) work on national food policy, Wayne Roberts' (2014) work on local food policy, Lori Stahlbrand's (2018) work on institutional food procurement, Annette Desmarais and Hannah Wittman's (2014) work on food sovereignty (see also Wittman et al., 2011), among others. Still, some approaches are limited in their ability to meaningfully engage with the state, with others being explicitly state-critical (Rotz, 2017; Roman-Alcalá, 2020). This reflects the diversity of the ways and extent to which food activists and scholars perceive and engage the state.

Several key strands of food activism and scholarship in the global North fail to meaningfully engage with the state as a key platform from which to enact change. These include charitable food initiatives as well as more consumer-based local activist movements. By focussing on private donations, food charity, and even localized—often consumption oriented—

¹ The European Commission's (2019) Farm-to-Fork Strategy seeks to do this through food and agriculture.

grassroots solutions, the actual and potential role of the state may be obscured. While such measures are important and do make a difference, they can only go so far. Those who need food assistance are not always able to benefit from these measures in the ways and to the extent they need (e.g., the Food Bank model; see Suschnigg, 2012), and those who want to make a difference are often unable to enact structural change through consumer-activism (e.g., “buy local”; see Dukeshire et al., 2011). Even well-intentioned local food enthusiasts who “vote with their dollars” reinforce consumers’ position of power over producers without fully sharing the risks or responsibilities associated with farming (Rosol & Barbosa Jr, 2021).

These trends, as exemplified above, are emblematic of how the state’s social services have been transferred to civil society during a period of neoliberalism—including in the food system (Allen & Guthman, 2006). Holt-Giménez (2017, p. 229) signals the “neoliberal shrinking of the state and the erosion of the public sphere” and suggests the food movement can break this political impasse by re-politicizing its organizations through the critical reconstruction of the public sphere. We echo calls for re-politicizing the “public sphere” and argue that we must likewise reclaim the state to shape public policy in order to prioritize collective demands over private interests. Towards this end, we draw on the Brazil case where organized civil society established a close relationship with the state to implement far-reaching, integrated food policies that play a central role in the country’s food system. Having political economy as a theoretical premise that highlights how public policy is not a neutral activity, but rather a site of political and social struggle, we focus on the public procurement of food (de Schutter, 2014) since “procurement and purchasing policies open up economic and social policy space for political actors” (McMurtry, 2014, p. 26) which makes institutional procurement a potential game changer for food systems transformation (Swensson et al., 2021). We ask: What can we learn from the Brazil case regarding how the state can be used to enact just food futures?

The state plays a central role in food systems (McKay et al., 2014; Vergara-Camus & Kay, 2017; Desmarais et al., 2017). In the current context of neoliberal globalization, which Philip McMichael (2009) calls the “third” or “corporate” food regime, corporations influence state decisions to leverage favorable conditions. In agreement with much of the existing literature, we insist that if the state is left out of critical scholarship and activism, corporate dominance over state function will remain unchallenged. Scholarship and activism that engages with the state is important because it encourages a structural approach that allows people, and not the market, to regulate food by directing state power towards specific agri-food mechanisms.² This paper argues that when discussing how food activists and scholars work together to make meaningful change across difference (i.e., across scale, geographies, ideas, etc.; Rosol et al., 2022, this issue) we must not overlook the potential role of the state. The state can act as a mediator and sponsor of the relations between society and the market (e.g., regulation, financing, and infrastructure). The premise of our research is that food activists and scholars must leverage the capacity, reach, and power of the state to enact far reaching social change.

² For a similar point based on climate, see Routledge et al. (2018).

This paper's contribution lies in presenting a case study that provides a Canadian audience with insight on how to mobilise through the state to reach transformative agri-food change, which is especially important when Canada is drafting a national food policy (Levkoe & Sheedy, 2019). If popular demands can be strategically positioned within policies and institutions, the state is a useful tool for enacting just food futures (see also Poppendieck, 2022, this issue). In engaging with Brazil's right turn, we add nuance to our claim by reasoning that progressive food policies must not only be institutionalized, as the literature has argued for some time (Claeys, 2012; Wittman, 2015; Trauger et al., 2017), but also socially broad enough to not become the targets of competing administrations. We argue that activists should seek to advance food policies that have broad social appeal and are also participatory to weather political changes in administrations.

Research design and methods

We base our argument on analysis of Brazil's two primary public food procurement policies which we have been studying over the last decade: The Food Acquisition Program (*Programa de Aquisição de Alimentos* [PAA]) and the National School Meal Program (*Programa Nacional de Alimentação Escolar* [PNAE]). The current version of these food policies sought to realise the broader goals set forth by the Zero Hunger program: i) increasing the effective demand for food; ii) lowering the price of food; and iii) establishing emergency programs to serve a portion of the population traditionally excluded from the market (Silva et al., 2010). Importantly, our research on these food policies looks different due to the perspectives and context of the research project. It is for this reason that despite having the word "program" in their names we understand PAA and PNAE as food policies, under the umbrella of the Zero hunger program.

Our research builds on institutional procurement policy scholarship (de Schutter, 2014; McMurtry, 2014; Swensson et al., 2021). Namely, scholarship on how these policies originated and functioned during the Worker Party (PT) governments in Brazil (2003–2016), published in Portuguese (Müller et al., 2012; Triches & Grisa, 2015) and in English (Wittman & Blesh, 2017; Pahnke, 2018). We contribute to this literature by focussing on how such policies have been impacted since the right came to power in 2016 when Michel Temer took office (see Niederle et al., 2019, 2022; Sabourin et al., 2020; see also section 4.3). Guided by a political economy approach, our analysis is based on the state—and understanding it as disputed (see section 3.1). Because of this, we focus on budget allocation as an indication of the material implications of such disputes that highlight changing policy priorities across different administrations.

To do this, we have taken the following steps:

First, we carried out a comprehensive documental review of PAA and PNAE using NVivo 11. Sources that include legislation, operational booklets, and reports on these public policies were analyzed in detail. When coding we established the following categories: legislation, budget, civil society participation, and countryside-city relations. With this, we

established an overview of the institutional arrangements that gave rise to PAA and PNAE, as well as their potential for generating structural changes in the countryside (e.g., by providing farmers with reliable income and job security) and in the city (e.g., combating food insecurity and social marginalization) by establishing new food marketing channels.

Second, we identified, cataloged, and read research about these topics and series of events published in Portuguese, English, and Spanish (our shared database is made up of about 240 sources). These sources address topics such as the state, markets, agri-food policies, social movements, and progressive social change. Here we reviewed trends in the academic literature on PAA and PNAE, specifically, and institutional procurement, generally. Which has allowed us to compare data obtained in the previous step and present our findings as informed by the current literature.

Third, we collected and analyzed recent PAA and PNAE data published by government agencies and social movements (e.g., PAA Data, The National Supply Company [CONAB], Food First Information and Action Network [FIAN], and others). After the PT administrations, however, food policy was no longer a priority and, because of this, such data was not as readily available to the public. This challenge led us to request additional contemporary data through Brazil's Freedom of Information Law. In this way, we have been able to update and evaluate our previous interview and fieldwork findings (Coca & Barbosa Jr, 2016a, 2018a; Coca, 2021) through “desk research” updates (Green & Cohen, 2021) that we centre primarily here.

Ethics approval provided by the Federal University of Alfenas' Research Ethics Committee (Process number: 44696721.0.0000.5142).

The state, corporate influence, and the possibility for social change

Defining “the state” as disputed

We recognize the state as the sum result of disputes, confrontations, and agreements between different—and sometimes competing—social groups and interests. The state participates directly in the material and immaterial production of development models (Bates, 2008). As relates to agri-food policies, the state contributes to the production of inequalities (e.g., subsidizing industrial agriculture with disproportionate specialized financing and technical support services) and, at the same time, is influenced by progressive forces that aim to eliminate inequalities (e.g., public procurement policies, agrarian reform, etc.). In this sense, we discuss the state through a political economy perspective (Furtado, 1958; Kautsky 1988; Arrighi, 1994; Sassen, 1996; Wallerstein, 2004; Amin, 2014), which recognizes the state's role in connection with global

markets and through state-society relations, offering further insights into state function within capitalism.

To outline the various ways in which the state has been studied, we draw on Vergara-Camus and Kay (2017) who have identified five approaches to the state that stand out in the agri-food literature: i) the neo-Weberian, which understands the state as endowed with relative autonomy that acts authoritatively and/or in developmentalist terms; ii) the Schumpeterian, which understands the state as determined based on its budget sources, in that rich countries tend to produce rentier states; iii) the Marxist, which sees the state as an instrument for reproducing the interests of hegemonic classes; iv) the Foucauldian, which interprets the state through governmentality (i.e., the establishment of a rationality that reproduces its own interests in individuals and institutions) and; v) the eclectic, which brings together some of the previous propositions and defines the state as an arena for conflict of interest, where diverse actors advance their strategies across different levels and scales. Our analysis into the actual and potential role of the state in agri-food systems can perhaps be understood as more closely aligned with Gramscian Marxism (see also Dale, 2021) which recognizes the co-constitutive relations between the state and civil/political society as struggle and conflict (Fontana, 2002). Conceivably, our perspective also bridges between Gramscian and Foucauldian conceptions to reach the more relational approach we intend (Hansen & Stepputat, 2001), as such derived from political economy but also allowing space for post structuralist preoccupations (see also Barbosa Jr & Roriz, 2021).

In defining state-society relations as struggle and conflict, as we do here, governance becomes a continuous process and not an isolated fact, which allows the state to be understood as both an instrument and result of political strategies. In this sense, governance is not just the unilateral action of governments or institutional arrangements, as it also involves associated networks, practices, rules, and norms that help uphold specific ways of life (McMichael, 2009). As informed by their research into “land grabs,” Wolford et al. (2013) draw attention to the ways and extent to which, in a neoliberal globalized world, “complexity” characterizes state formation and activity. The authors argue that governments and governance are shaped by a broad spectrum of activities and possibilities, be they large or small. Such a phenomenon is possible because states are not composed of homogeneous bodies, as we tend to assume colloquially (i.e., of politicians and bureaucrats) but, rather, states are permeable to different groups and social classes with competing interests (Rocha & Barbosa Jr, 2018). In this way the state is “built” through disputes, while it also governs through them (Lund, 2016).

How disputes for the state shape agri-food systems

In the context of neoliberal globalization, corporate interests strongly influence agri-food policies (Clapp, 2012). We believe that agri-food policies provide an especially illustrative example of the ways and extent to which corporations exert influence over the state. Before delving into the

possible changes that can come from mobilizing through the state, we first present the various ways in which corporations influence the state to shape agri-food policies. The state promotes corporate interests through various means that include public financing of large agribusiness producers, the creation of sanitary and health regulations favourable to marketing large scale production, and the construction of infrastructure to transport commodities (Clapp, 2012; Sauer, 2017).

Despite corporate influence over state policy, the state can also be a vehicle for change within agri-food systems, albeit often only partially. Examples include agrarian reform, protecting agricultural land, promoting universal basic income, establishing national food policy, monitoring environmental degradation, as well as regulating markets and labour—e.g., migrant, restaurant, and food delivery workers (Borras Jr., 2008; Levkoe & Sheedy, 2019; Power & McBay, 2022, this issue; Weiler & Grez, 2022, this issue). Structural change can also occur through actions such as orienting institutional markets to address social issues, land de-concentration, and the creation of legal mechanisms to ensure universal access to food (Friedmann, 2007; Claeys, 2012).

Scholars are especially interested in the ways social movements have been able to mobilize the state towards progressive ends, namely in enacting social policies. The Latin American experience (Vergara-Camus & Kay, 2017), in particular, has been widely documented and analyzed (e.g., Wittman, 2015). During the “pink tide,” centre-left governments who were elected with a strong popular base allocated public resource towards social policies, in particular food policies that sought to eradicate hunger while also providing small scale family farms with marketing channels (McKay et al., 2014). This was carried out, however, through the intensification of extractivism, leading to the term neoextractivism (Veltmeyer & Petras, 2014), which refers to how progressive social policies and extractivism became inexorably linked in Latin America.

In the literature, these experiences are assessed from different perspectives, ranging from approaches that reinforce their contribution to the production of progressive changes to those that see them as limited and/or contradictory (McKay, 2020). One end of this broad spectrum emphasizes that the involvement of social movements and other civil society actors with governments prioritizes localized food circuits, especially of peasant and Indigenous products (Maluf et al., 2015; Wittman, 2015; Coca & Barbosa Jr, 2016b, 2018b). This is relevant since along with the growth of the food sovereignty movement, several collectives have sought to influence institutions at the sub-national (municipal and state/ provincial), national, regional (e.g., European Union, North American Free Trade Agreement [NAFTA], The Southern Common Market [Mercosur]), and global levels (Trauger et al., 2017). As a result, food sovereignty was formally recognized in the constitution of countries like Ecuador and Bolivia (McKay et al., 2014), and by global institutions such as the United Nations Committee on World Food Security (Brem-Wilson, 2017). At the other end of the spectrum, there are those who defend the idea that structural changes in agri-food systems—as advocated by the food sovereignty movement—cannot occur within the capitalist political-economic framework,

requiring a break from colonial, neoliberal, and neo-development models (Zibechi, 2010; Dardot & Laval, 2013). Bernstein (2014, p. 1054), for example, asserts that the state is the “elephant in the room” in the implementation of food sovereignty, as even popular governments have faced difficulties enacting progressive social policies. Within this broad spectrum there are those who find middle ground, recognizing the importance of the state at least in the short to mid-term, while maintaining that the state itself must be overcome in the long term (Cumbers, 2015; Kepkiewicz & Rotz, 2018).³

The continued importance of mobilising through the state

States can be defined as a set of networks, terrains of contestation, or abstract principles that present themselves with shape, presence, and form (Cooper, 2017). In this way, states produce and reproduce the contradictions of the societies that have built and continue to shape them. As we have reasoned, agri-food policies are formulated by processes that involve conflicts and arrangements between different subjects, social movements, corporations, and institutions. As such, the state’s role in promoting progressive agri-food change must be studied in its full complexity. We must consider how the state performs multiple functions in governance processes (Ehrnström-Fuentes & Kröger, 2018). The state represents simultaneously the manifestation of corporate control over food and the possibility for progressive agri-food change. We echo claims others have made of how the state is needed for far-reaching social change (Akram-Lodhi, 2015; Routledge et al., 2018). Establishing limits to the power of the market is one of the great challenges for the better functioning of agri-food systems, as within capitalism the market fails to recognise food as a public good (see Vivero-Pol, 2017). In this sense, we start from the understanding that the liberal model of *laissez-faire* is fraught with imperfections and that public-power must regulate the market. In relation to agri-food systems, it is the responsibility of the state to create mechanisms that at once guarantee the permanence of family-based farming, actively including them in the market, in addition to facilitating and guaranteeing the access of all consumers to foods of high nutritional value.

To be implemented through the state, progressive agri-food policies need a favourable correlation of forces. This can happen through pressure exerted by social movements—e.g., protests, boycotts, land occupations, and other forms of contestation (Gray, 2018)—or through participation in formal state processes (Abers & Keck 2009), which tends to occur when governments are elected through popular mobilisation. Such actions help to guide the state in service of the people, which includes “holding officials accountable and ensuring that the actions of the state express the will of the citizenry” (Holt-Giménez, 2017, p. 229). In this way, the state is simultaneously a target, sponsor, and antagonist of social movements that seek political

³ See Wilson and Levkoe (2022, this issue) for an exploration of the tensions between immediate focus and long-term structural change.

representation (Jenkins & Klandermans, 1995). This institutionalizes collective demands through cosmopolitan, multicultural, and anti-hegemonic conceptions of human rights (Claeys, 2012; Wittman, 2015).

For this reason, we draw on a political economy approach that allows us to consider relations between the state, society, and market (see section 3.1). Drawing on (agrarian) political economy we analyze institutional procurement (de Schutter, 2014). Public food procurement can contribute towards strengthening a proposal for the development of agriculture that favours groups of producers and consumers that are subjected to unfavorable conditions within capitalism, thus, creating new opportunities (Nehring et al., 2017). Adopting public procurement as a strategy to partially remedy the market economy's problems is not new (McMurtry, 2014; Sumner & Stahlbrand, 2018; Poppendieck, 2022, this issue). In the recent past, such actions have been used, for example, to create jobs for immigrants and racial minority groups in the United States and South Africa, to promote gender equality in European countries, and for the empowerment of Canadian Indigenous peoples (de Schutter, 2014). Since then, institutional procurement—a mechanism through which the state intervenes in markets—has been employed as a means of reshaping specific stages of food systems. Such examples are found both in high-income countries of the global North (Allen & Guthman, 2006; Friedmann, 2007) and, also, in low-income countries of the global South (Maluf & Prado, 2015; Coca, 2021).

National food policies and institutional procurement in Brazil

A brief history of food politics and policy

Brazil's Food and Nutrition Security (SAN) is characterized as a social bottom-up response to food insecurity (Maluf, 2006). In the mid-twentieth century, Josué de Castro (1946) identified hunger as a social phenomenon and paved the way for measures that sought to eradicate it. When the brutal military dictatorship ended (1964–1985), and a new Brazilian constitution came into effect in 1988, the Health Reform Movement incorporated SAN into their political agenda. However, it was only in the 1990s, through the actions of the Citizenship Institute, that SAN acquired its own defining characteristics (Maluf & Prado, 2015). As the Citizenship Institute promoted the Parallel Government—a critical action against the Fernando Collor de Mello administration (1990–1992) where organized civil society proposed policy alternatives based on participatory governance of social policies—the creation of a National Council of Food and Nutritional Security (CONSEA) was planned as a joint entity with participation from civil society and public agencies that would monitor food policies in Brazil. CONSEA's short-lived activities (1993–1994) ended during Fernando Henrique Cardoso's first term in office (1995–1998) (Leão & Maluf, 2012).

The social construction of SAN in Brazil regained momentum at the beginning of the twenty-first century, when the Citizenship Institute formulated the Zero Hunger Project, adopted as one of the main proposals for Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva's (2003–2010) PT government (Silva et al., 2010). After the reinstatement of CONSEA in 2003, the Organic Law on Food and Nutrition Security (LOSAN) was implemented in 2006, establishing the National System of Food and Nutrition Security (SISAN), and declaring the need to introduce CONSEA at the state and municipal levels. LOSAN also recommended the preparation of a National Food and Nutrition Security Policy (PNSAN) and Plan (PLANSAN). In 2007 the Inter-ministerial Chamber of Food and Nutritional Security (CAISAN) was created, which contributed to the institutionalization of SAN as a guiding directive of entities and ministries linked to the Presidency. Maluf et al. (2015) argues that SAN's rich history of struggle—and the resulting democratized governance model for food policies—exemplifies food sovereignty.

The Zero Hunger Program and PT-era food policies

Brazilian public food procurement policies emerged in 2003 as part of the Zero Hunger program adopted by the new PT government. These policies were the result of Lula's campaign promise during the 2002 electoral race and can be understood in part as the result of the coalitions he formed with popular movements, especially rural social movements—the most notable example being the Landless Workers Movement (MST). At that moment, the fight against hunger became a priority for the federal government (Wittman & Blesh, 2017), leading to the creation of the Food Acquisition Program (PAA) and the new version of the National School Meal Program (PNAE). However, it is important to recognize that this process was the result of popular struggle and civil society's capacity to make the most of the available political opportunities, rather than the unilateral action of a progressive government, as is often simplistically claimed.

PAA was established by Law 10,696 on July 2, 2003 and foresees the acquisition of products from family agriculture without competitive bidding. The federal government donates the purchased food to institutions registered in the social welfare network, such as daycares, nursing homes, and hospitals (Müller et al., 2012). PNAE has existed since 1955 and is the oldest food policy in Brazil. The new version of PNAE, updated by Law 11,947 on June 16, 2009, established that at least 30 percent of the products purchased with resources from the National Fund for the Development of Education (*Fundo Nacional de Desenvolvimento da Educação* [FNDE]) should come from family agriculture (Triches & Grisa, 2015). PNAE is also based on a wide-ranging framework of regional and local participatory spaces (e.g., school councils). Through both initiatives, preference is given to producers who organize themselves in cooperatives and associations, especially those with significant participation of women. Organic or agroecological products are purchased at a price 30 percent higher than conventional agriculture, incentivizing sustainable agricultural practices. In these ways, a particular type of farmer and farming is favoured.

Brazil has arguably one of the most robust national-level food policy structures (Wittman & Blesh, 2017; Pahnke, 2018). These public policies are innovative because, unlike other public food procurement processes, they designate family farmers as a priority producer group,⁴ and aid people in conditions of social vulnerability (de Schutter, 2014). These measures address various agri-food issues, such as market conditions for farmers, while simultaneously promoting disenfranchised urban consumers' access to healthy food. Furthermore, these policies incentivize farmers to work collectively, empower women, and promote sustainable agriculture, thus demonstrating that the state can promote progressive change in the agri-food system when directed towards this end. By purchasing directly from family farms, the variety and quantity of healthy foods available in schools improved, with an increase in vegetable consumption and a decrease in food with high sugar content (Soares et al., 2017). PNAE feeds over 40 million students, some of them three meals a day, and provides a secure market for many family farmers (Coca & Barbosa Jr, 2018a). These policies have been extensively evaluated by multilateral institutions, leading to Brazil's removal from the Hunger Map in 2014. Despite criticism from the United States' government in the World Trade Organization that such public policies are indirect forms of subsidy, the model is spreading. In June 2015, the Brazilian federal government established a technical cooperation agreement with the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), with the objective of showcasing the Brazilian experience in fighting hunger as a reference for other countries in the global South, primarily in Latin America (Coca, 2021) and Africa (Nehring & Hoffmann, 2017).

The far-right rises, food policies decline

The rise of the far-right and rural authoritarian populism is one of the most striking political phenomena of the last decade. The term “authoritarian populism” (see Scoones et al., 2018) characterizes “certain strategic shifts in the political/ideological conjuncture. Essentially, it refers to changes in the ‘balance of forces.’ It refers directly to the modalities of political and ideological relationships between the ruling bloc, the state, and the dominated classes” (Hall, 1985, p. 119). The June 2013 protests in Brazil are often identified as a key moment when generalized discontent led varying groups to take to the streets. While the June protests cannot be simply understood as a “right-wing” protest, it marks a key moment when the far-right was able to organize and gain further mainstream appeal in Brazil. The 2014 elections, where the PT incumbent Dilma Rousseff won by a razor thin margin, exposed just how polarized the country had become. The 2016 *coup d'état* was perhaps the culmination of this process when Rousseff was taken out of office and Michel Temer (2016–2018) took power illegitimately, and was further reinforced by Jair Bolsonaro's (2019–ongoing) electoral success in 2018.

⁴ In Brazil, family farming is defined by Law 11,326/2006. Family farms can be as large as four fiscal modules but must rely predominantly on the family's labour. Fiscal module refers to the minimum average size of rural property according to the municipality in which the property is located. This flexible distinction is important as average rural property size varies greatly across Brazil.

While food policies were already showing signs of decline during Rousseff's second term, the true dismantling process began when the far-right came to power.⁵ Temer dissolved the Agrarian Development Ministry (MDA) with Decree 8,786/2016 and approved Constitutional Amendment 95, which established a spending cap on public investment for twenty years, constitutionalizing fiscal austerity in Brazil. This severely impacted food policies that supported family farming, reducing their margin of participation in the state's budget, and compromising the goals of the 2016–2019 PLANSAN. The neoliberal reforms initiated in 2016 are then executed and reinforced by Bolsonaro's notably authoritarian project (Bruff & Tansel, 2019; Soyer & Barbosa Jr, 2020). Bolsonaro extinguished CONSEA through Provisional Measure 870/2019 the day he took office. By closing spaces for dialogue with civil society Bolsonaro left no doubt as to his administration's stance towards SAN. The Bolsonaro administration's position on food was made evident by his controversial declaration that "hunger in Brazil is a lie" (Folha de São Paulo, 2019, unpaginated), despite reports showing that hunger has been increasing since he took office (FIAN Brasil, 2019) and especially during the pandemic (Galindo et al., 2021). But how can we make sense of the far-right's dismantling of food policy in Brazil and how does this point to the challenges of mobilizing through the state?

The rise of the far-right in Brazil has brought about studies that assess the impact of far-right governments on the agri-food world. The literature reveals how the far-right has been successful in exploiting discontent (see Fischer, 2020) to erode the social policies benefitting family farmers (Niederle et al., 2019, 2022).

Results

We identify institutional procurement as exemplifying the state's role not only in stabilizing and growing the economy but also in enacting redistribution. Specifically, we compare how PAA and PNAE have been affected since the far-right came to power in Brazil in 2016. These two policies illustrate the advantages and challenges of mobilizing through the state.

In short, PAA has suffered big budget cuts while PNAE, which is connected with the National Fund for the Development of Education, has maintained its social and economic functions of fighting hunger via school meals and providing local family farmers with a marketing channel for their products. In comparing these two institutional food procurement policies we add nuance and empirical support to claims on the importance of mobilizing through the state to promote just food futures (Rosol et al., 2022, this issue).

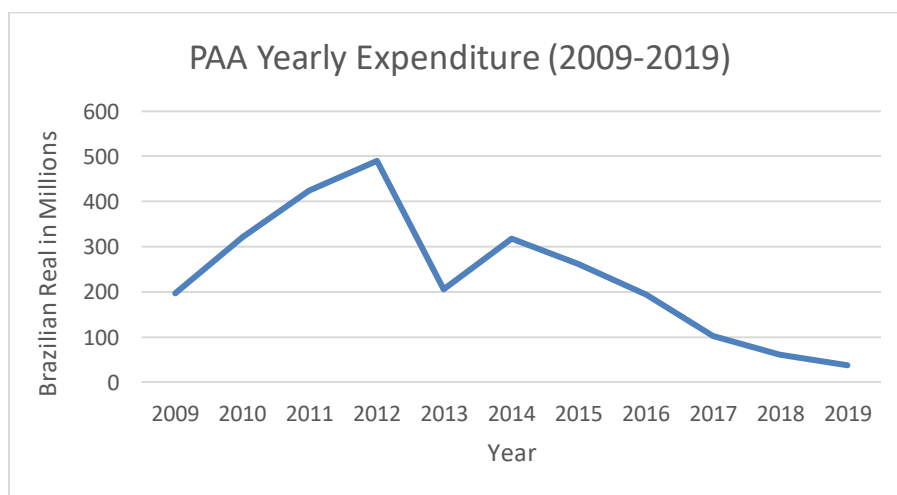
⁵ While here we draw specific attention to the far-right's effect on food policies it is also important to recognize that alongside these processes there was increased deregulation of environmental and land protection (Sparovek et al., 2019; Menezes & Barbosa Jr, 2021) as well as an increase of violence and conflict in the countryside (Barbosa Jr & Roriz, 2021).

Food Acquisition Program (PAA)

PAA is an example of how social movements mobilization for certain public policies are dependent on alignment with the government, be they allies or not. Temer and Bolsonaro—who came to power through the support of agribusiness, in opposition to progressive peasant and family farmer movements (Soyer & Barbosa Jr, 2021; for more see 4.3)—offer strong unilateral support for capitalist agriculture, which has led public food procurement and family farming policies to be neglected and even actively dismantled.

Figure 1 shows that PAA public expenditure increased during the PT administration (2003–2016), with a decrease during Rousseff’s first term (2011–2014). The decrease occurred alongside growing legal interference in politics that took place in Brazil, affecting public policies like PAA. One of the most emblematic examples of this was the Agro-Fantasma operation, which imprisoned thirteen family farmers with accusations of embezzling PAA funds (Triches & Grisa, 2015). All these farmers were acquitted when the charges against them were found to be groundless. However, this was enough to publicly discredit PAA, which led to a decrease in public resources made available for the initiative. It is important to note that the judge who ordered these farmers be arrested was Sérgio Moro, who would later become the face of the Lava Jato operation—which kept Lula from running in the 2018 election—and was then appointed as Bolsonaro’s Justice Minister once he took office. In this way, the first budget cuts PAA suffered were the result of a broader process of judicialization that occurred while PT governments were still in power.

Figure 1: PAA Yearly Expenditure (2009-2019) (author’s compilation, data from CONAB requested through Brazil’s Freedom of Information Law)⁶



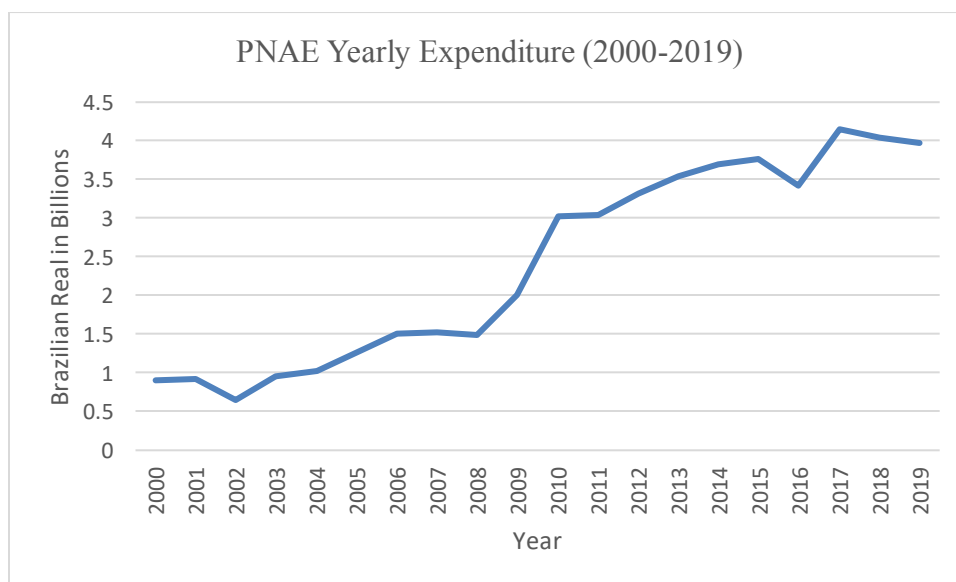
⁶ PAA has six modalities. We select the two modalities with the largest budgets: purchase with simultaneous donation and stock formation.

As Figure 1 shows, the budget cuts made to PAA continued apace after the 2016 *coup*. Temer distanced the federal government from social movements and implemented an austerity agenda in Brazil. PAA was one of the food policies that suffered the greatest impact (see Figure 1). Instead of outright ending PAA, which would most likely lead to widespread public backlash, the Temer administration sought to drastically decrease PAA’s budget until the initiative was unable to operate effectively—a process continued by the Bolsonaro administration.

National School Meal Program (PNAE)

In contrast to PAA, PNAE has remained mostly intact and functional, despite the far-right coming to power. PNAE’s budget increased starting in Lula’s second term (2007–2010), with small fluctuations from 2015 to 2016 and from 2018 to 2019 (see Figure 2). This has only been possible because PNAE has a predetermined budget associated with the national education budget—Article 5 of Law 11,947 published on June 16, 2009.

Figure 2: PNAE Yearly Expenditure (2000-2019) (*Tribunal de Contas da União [TCU], 2020; author’s compilation, data from World Food Programme [WFP] & FNDE, 2019*)



We argue that by identifying the contradictions of mobilizing through the state,⁷ scholars and activists can strive for measures that are better equipped to overcome issues resulting from institutional change and the transition of power, be it democratic or not (as in 2018 and 2016, respectively). The data shows that PNAE's budget has remained relatively stable while other social and food policies, like PAA, have been dismantled. PNAE has managed to remain largely operational because it is linked to the Education Ministry and the national education budget which is generally seen as “untouchable”—since it is defended by various sectors across society. For this very reason, PNAE has been the focus of continued attacks during the Bolsonaro administration. One recent example is the proposed Law 5,695/2019 that among other goals sought to dissociate PNAE funds from FNDE—and, thus, the educational budget—and even remove the stipulation that at least 30 percent of the products should come from local family farmers. These two provisions were targeted precisely because they respectively provide PNAE with its budgetary autonomy, regardless of any current administration, and its redistributive power by guaranteeing a market share for local family farmers which also limits the amount of food procured from conventional corporate suppliers.

Still, beyond this, in 2020, civil society mobilizations successfully redirected PNAE's R\$4 billion budget to “food kits” for low-income families with school-aged children during COVID-19 via Decree 6/2020, which charges municipalities with implementing PNAE-based COVID-19 emergency food response (Barbosa Jr, Coca & Soyer, 2022). Even during a pandemic PNAE has been able to adapt, showing that the policy is well equipped to overcome not only the far-right but also promote public goods through emergency response efforts during the pandemic. In doing so, PNAE remains one of the select national-level policies that has been able to provide pandemic relief during COVID-19. Pandemic relief has been largely mismanaged by the Bolsonaro administration which downplays the virus and the need for an effective pandemic response (see Pfrimer & Barbosa Jr, 2020).

Discussion

Institutional procurement, as exemplified by the Brazil case, shows how food producers and consumers can jointly benefit from a public policy that seeks to promote change across agri-food systems. In such cases, the state directly intervenes in the market by creating specific commercialization channels for family farmers. By questioning how institutions get their food as well as creating awareness of their purchasing size and power, it becomes evident how this portion of the market can be leveraged into food-based change. Through institutional procurement the state can mediate the transfer of food directly from farmers to consumers,

⁷ A key concern is that adapting ideas and agendas to the state structure may divest them of their radical potential. Along these same lines, social movements that align themselves very closely with the state have been accused of being coopted, losing connection to the base, and becoming too caught up the bureaucratisation of the struggle.

especially focussing on those that are simply not able to obtain good food through market-based means. Institutional procurement addresses the problem of farmer's access to market and has the potential to democratize access to good food, realizing just food futures (Rosol et al., 2022, this issue).

Still, proposals for authentic social change require durable policy arrangements that are not subject to the interests of specific administrations. The two policies presented illustrate this by showing how PNAE has remained mostly functional since 2016, while PAA is restricted by the interests and budget allocation of each administration. PAA exemplifies the challenge of mobilizing through the state. It shows how progressive social policies must formally establish a continuing predetermined budget that binds future administrations—that is, not only creating good food policies but institutionalizing them (i.e., formalizing food rights and values as legal measures and mechanisms within state apparatus) as the literature has drawn attention to (Claeys, 2012; Wittman, 2015; Trauger et al., 2017; Dale, 2021). As opposed to setting the budget on an ongoing basis, which subjects food policies to the preferences of future—possibly competing—administrations.

Our contribution lies in further complicating the challenges of institutionalization, based on an empirical case. Specifically, we draw attention to how food activists and scholars must ensure progressive changes encompasses the breadth of social and political needs or aspirations to not become the targets of competing administrations. Otherwise, progressive food policies are susceptible to being dismantled once an opposition government takes office. The evidence we provide demonstrates how PNAE appeals to broader sectors of society, since it reaches all public-school students in Brazil. Additionally, PNAE exemplifies greater capillarity as civil society is actively engaged through participatory spaces, such as CONSEA and school councils. Continued civil society participation with PNAE strengthens the policy's institutionalization. Which means that PNAE's durability is also related to a policy design that includes broader participation of civil society in its implementation.

Our point is that PNAE (associated with education) is more institutionally durable than PAA (associated with family farmers). Importantly, it is not the policy framing or language that are broad—these seek to address specific issues. Rather, the policy itself is supported by a broad base because it has wide social appeal. Both policies have a clear structure, set of objectives, and so on. Yet, PNAE is able to do this while being framed as “food for students” rather than just a “market for family farmers” as PAA is often reduced to. Despite PAA food donations made to multiple vulnerable groups within cities, few sectors of Brazilian society identify with family farmers, illuminating a policy weakness.⁸ Significantly, when PT was in power, policies for the institutional procurement of food was a demand from social movements made possible through their engagement with the state (Coca, 2021). Since 2016, when the far-right came to power,

⁸ It is worth noting that PNAE, created in 1955, is much older than PAA which may factor into its institutional durability. Yet, it was only in 2009 that PNAE was radically redesigned to stipulate that at least 30 percent of the products procured should come from local family farmers. A timeframe similar to PAA, created in 2003.

these same public policies have become a target precisely because they were linked to social movements like MST.

Conclusion and outlook

In offering evidence of the centrality of the state in promoting just food futures through the Brazil case, we hope to inspire food activism and scholarship that recognizes the role of the state and positions it as an arena of struggle to enact emancipatory and just food futures. Importantly, we are not arguing that all power or “the political will” comes from the state, rather that the state can be strategically used as a platform for far-reaching social change. Along the same lines of Routledge et al. (2018, p. 79) who argued for an “agenda that is enabled through grassroots mobilization in collaboration with state action” for climate, we propose the same for food. Our main point is that progressive demands need to be broadly supported and strategically institutionalized to be participatory if they are to survive the onslaught of neoliberalism and the far-right.

The far-rights’ rise to power across the globe has drawn the attention to the centrality of state control in furthering emancipatory political projects.⁹ Perhaps, as Holt-Giménez (2017, p. 229) suggests, “the time is ripe, as the horror of the Trump administration’s program begins to sink in, to build an alternative vision of the public sphere.” It may be that a shift to the far-right, past the neoliberal parties that have been in power for the past decades, takes us back to the need to dispute the state, since we are all reminded that who controls the state matters.¹⁰ In this way, engaging with the state is also about limiting the harm of the state, especially when it is captured by the far-right, and pushing back against the extension of state power.¹¹ To end, while the Brazil case illustrates how food politics and policies are (or, perhaps can be) about much more than the food itself, it also allows us to reimagine the state (Cooper et al., 2019) and consider how we may enact institutional arrangements differently (Cooper, 2020).

In engaging with the state, we can mobilize the power of institutions to change food systems—e.g., leveraging the purchasing power of the state through institutional procurement (see Kleine & Brightwell, 2015). In doing so, food scholars and activists go beyond private agri-food governance (Kalfagianni, 2015) towards effective public agri-food governance that includes, but is not limited to, the state.

In applying these findings to the Canadian context, we may extend beyond the focus of changing individual consumer behavior to fully embrace Canadian food movement actors desire

⁹ Even the attention of those who are state-critical, see Kepkiewicz and Rotz (2018) and Roman-Alcalá (2020).

¹⁰ We recognize that these points may resonate differently in the global North wherein a change in government may not always imply in a direct change in most people’s lives. In the global South, however, the change in administration may immediately and directly entail significant changes. As a result, the far-right administrations in the global North offer a unique opportunity to showcase the value of and need to “capture the state” instead.

¹¹ We thank Amanda Wilson for making this point to us.

to see greater policy engagement and effective shifts in the food policy landscape (Wilson & Levkoe, 2022, this issue). In dialogue with Poppendieck (2022, this issue), this allows us to consider public policy activism as a form of food activism. Engagement with the state through public policy activism may be a means to address the lack of politicization within Canadian food movements, identified by Wilson and Levkoe (2022, this issue). Public policy food activism allows underlying structural issues to be targeted directly, overcoming Canada’s long history of addressing food security through “charity-based models” and food change through “alternative grassroots community initiatives.” Brazil’s recent experience with participatory food procurement policies could be a reason for hope in this struggle.

Acknowledgements: An earlier version of this paper was presented at the ‘Towards Just Food Futures Workshop’ at the University of Calgary in May 2021. We thank Eric Holt-Giménez, Marit Rosol, Lauren Kepkiewicz, Amanda Wilson, Charles Levkoe, and Pedro Vasconcelos whose attentive reading of and critical engagement with our work has allowed us to clarify and add nuance to our argument. We also thank Abby Landon for copy-editing the manuscript. Any shortcomings or mistakes are our own, of course.

References

- Abers, R., & Keck, M. E. (2009). Mobilizing the state: The erratic partner in Brazil’s participatory water policy. *Politics & Society*, 37(2), 289–314.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0032329209334003>
- Akram-Lodhi, A. H. (2015). Accelerating towards food sovereignty. *Third World Quarterly*, 36(3), 563–583. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01436597.2015.1002989>
- Allen, P., & Guthman, J. (2006). From “old school” to “farm-to-school”: Neoliberalization from the ground up. *Agriculture and Human Values*, 23(4), 401–415.
<https://doi.org/10.1007/s10460-006-9019-z>
- Amin, S. (2014). *Capitalism in the age of globalization: The management of contemporary society*. Zed Books Ltd.
- Andrée, P., Clark, J. K., Levkoe, C., & Lowitt, K. (Eds.). (2019). *Civil society and social movements in food system governance*. Routledge.
- Arrighi, G. (1994). *The long twentieth century: Money, power, and the origins of our times*. Verso.
- Barbosa Jr, R., & Roriz, J. (2021). The subversive practice of counting bodies: Documenting violence and conflict in rural Brazil. *Journal of Agrarian Change*, 21(4), 870–886.
<https://doi.org/10.1111/joac.12416>

- Barbosa Jr, R., Coca, E., & Soyer, G. (2022). School food at home: Brazil's national school food programme (PNAE) during the COVID-19 pandemic. *Social & Cultural Geography*, In press.
- Bates, R. H. (2008). The role of the state in development. In B. R. Weingast & D. A. Wittman (Eds.), *The Oxford handbook of political economy* (pp. 708–722). Oxford University Press.
- Bernstein, H. (2014). Food sovereignty via the 'peasant way': A skeptical view. *The Journal of Peasant Studies*, 41(6), 1031–1063. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03066150.2013.852082>
- Borras Jr, S. M. (2008). La Vía Campesina and its global campaign for agrarian reform. *Journal of Agrarian Change*, 8(2-3), 258-289. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1471-0366.2008.00170.x>
- Brem-Wilson, J. (2017). La Vía Campesina and the UN Committee on World Food Security: Affected publics and institutional dynamics in the nascent transnational public sphere. *Review of International Studies*, 43(2), 302–329. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0260210516000309>
- Bruff, I., & Tansel, C. B. (2019). Authoritarian neoliberalism: Trajectories of knowledge production and praxis. *Globalizations*, 16(3), 233–244. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14747731.2018.1502497>
- Castro, J. de. (1946). *Geografia da fome: A fome no Brasil*. O Cruzeiro.
- Claeys, P. (2012). The creation of new rights by the food sovereignty movement: The challenge of institutionalizing subversion. *Sociology*, 46(5), 844–860. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0038038512451534>
- Clapp, J. (2012). *Food*. Polity Press.
- Coca, E., & Barbosa Jr, R. (2016a). Um ensaio sobre o desenvolvimento territorial: Do incentivo ao empreendedorismo na Europa ao combate à pobreza na América Latina. *ACTA Geográfica*, 10(24), 80–93. <http://doi.org/10.5654/acta.v10i24.3301>
- Coca, E., & Barbosa Jr, R. (2016b). (Re)Approximating food producers and consumers in metro Vancouver, Canada. *Dimensión Empresarial*, 14(1), 11–26. <http://dx.doi.org/10.15665/rde.v14i1.596>
- Coca, E., & Barbosa Jr, R. (2018a). Responding to neoliberal diets: School meal programmes in Brazil and Canada. In A. Gray & R. Hinch (Eds.), *A handbook of food crime: Immoral and illegal practices in the food industry and what to do about them* (pp. 347–363). Bristol University Press. <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctt22rbk9t.26>
- Coca, E., & Barbosa Jr, R. (2018b). Hortas escolares em Vancouver, Canadá como parte da 'segunda geração' da soberania alimentar. *Ateliê Geográfico*, 12(1), 219–36. <https://doi.org/10.5216/ag.v12i1.49270>
- Coca, E. (2021). Food procurement in post-neoliberal countries: Examples from South America. *Agrarian South: Journal of Political Economy*, 10(2), 275–295. <https://doi.org/10.1177/22779760211032067>
- Cooper, D. (2017). Prefiguring the state. *Antipode*, 49(2), 335–356. <https://doi.org/10.1111/anti.12277>

- Cooper, D., Dhawan, N., & Newman, J. (2019). *Reimagining the state: Theoretical challenges and transformative possibilities*. Routledge.
- Cooper, D. (2020). Towards an adventurous institutional politics: The prefigurative ‘as if’ and the reposing of what’s real. *The Sociological Review*, 68(5), 893–916.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0038026120915148>
- Cumbers, A. (2015). Constructing a global commons in, against and beyond the state. *Space and Polity*, 19(1), 62–75. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13562576.2014.995465>
- Dale, B. (2021). Food sovereignty and the integral state: Institutionalizing ecological farming. *Geoforum*, 127, 137–150. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.geoforum.2021.10.010>
- Dardot, P., & Laval, C. (2013). *The new way of the world: On neoliberal society*. Verso.
- de Schutter, O. (2014). *The power of procurement: Public purchasing in the service of realizing the right to food*. United Nations.
- Desmarais, A., & Wittman, H. (2014). Farmers, foodies, and First Nations: Getting to food sovereignty in Canada. *The Journal of Peasant Studies*, 41(6), 1153–1173.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/03066150.2013.876623>
- Desmarais, A., Claeys, P., & Trauger, A. (Eds.). (2017). *Public policies for food sovereignty: Social movements and the state*. Routledge.
- Dukeshire, S., Garbes, R., Kennedy, C., Boudreau, A., & Osborne, T. (2011). Beliefs, attitudes, and propensity to buy locally produced food. *Journal of Agriculture, Food Systems, and Community Development*, 1(3), 19–29. <https://doi.org/10.5304/jafscd.2011.013.008>
- Dunlap, A., & Jakobsen, J. (2020). *The violent technologies of extraction: Political ecology, critical agrarian studies and the capitalist worldeater*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- European Commission (2019). *Farm to fork strategy for a fair, healthy and environmentally-friendly food system*. Food Safety. ec.europa.eu/food/horizontal-topics/farm-fork-strategy_en
- Ehrnström-Fuentes, M., & Kröger, M. (2018). Birthing extractivism: The role of the state in forestry politics and development in Uruguay. *Journal of Rural Studies*, 57, 197–208.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jrurstud.2017.12.022>
- FIAN Brasil. (2019). *Informe DHANA 2019: Autoritarismo, negação de direitos e fome*. FIAN Brasil. https://fianbrasil.org.br/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/Informe-Dhana-2019_v-final.pdf
- Fischer, A. M. (2020). The dark sides of social policy: From neoliberalism to resurgent right-wing populism. *Development and Change*, 51(2), 371–397.
<https://doi.org/10.1111/dech.12577>
- Folha de São Paulo. (2019, July 22). Bolsonaro says hunger in Brazil is a lie. UOL. <https://www1.folha.uol.com.br/internacional/en/brazil/2019/07/bolsonaro-says-hunger-in-brazil-is-a-lie.shtml>
- Fontana, B. (2002). Gramsci on Politics and State. *Journal of Classical Sociology*, 2(2), 157–178. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1468795X02002002856>

- Friedmann, H. (2007). Scaling up: Bringing public institutions and food service corporations into the project for a local, sustainable food system in Ontario. *Agriculture and Human Values*, 24(3), 389–398. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10460-006-9040-2>
- Furtado, C. (1958). *Formação Econômica Do Brasil*. Companhia das Letras.
- Galindo, E., Teixeira, M. A., de Araújo, M., Motta, R., Pessoa, M., Mendes, L., & Rennó, L. (2021). *Effects of the pandemic on food consumption and on the situation of food security in Brazil* (No. 4; p. 43). Food for Justice. doi.org/10.17169/refubium-29554
- Gray, P. C. (Ed.). (2018). *From the streets to the state: Changing the world by taking power*. SUNY Press.
- Green, A. H., & Cohen, D. K. (2021). Centering human subjects: The ethics of “desk research” on political violence. *Journal of Global Security Studies*, 6(2), ogaa029; <https://doi.org/10.1093/jogss/ogaa029>
- Hall, S. (1985). Authoritarian populism: A reply. *New Left Review*, 151, 115–124.
- Hansen, T. B., & Stepputat, F. (2001). *States of imagination: Ethnographic explorations of the postcolonial state*. Duke University Press.
- Himmelgreen, D. A., & Romero-Daza, N. (2010). Eliminating “hunger” in the U.S.: Changes in policy regarding the measurement of food security. *Food and Foodways*, 18(1–2), 96–113. <https://doi.org/10.1080/07409711003708611>
- Holt-Giménez, E. (2017). *A foodie’s guide to capitalism: Understanding the political economy of what we eat*. Monthly Review Press.
- Jenkins, J. C., & Klandermans, B. (Eds.). (1995). *The politics of social protest*. University of Minnesota Press.
- Kalfagianni, A. (2015). ‘Just food.’ The normative obligations of private agrifood governance. *Global Environmental Change*, 31, 174–186. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.gloenvcha.2015.01.007>
- Kautsky, K. (1988). *The agrarian question* (P. Burgess, Trans.). Zwan Publications. (Original work published 1899).
- Kepkiewicz, L., & Rotz, S. (2018). Toward anti-colonial food policy in Canada? (Im)possibilities within the settler state. *Canadian Food Studies / La Revue Canadienne Des Études Sur l’alimentation*, 5(2), 13–24. <https://doi.org/10.15353/cfs-rcea.v5i2.202>
- Kleine, D., & Brightwell, M. das G. (2015). Repoliticising and scaling-up ethical consumption: Lessons from public procurement for school meals in Brazil. *Geoforum*, 67, 135–147. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.geoforum.2015.08.016>
- Koc, M., MacRae, R., Desjardins, E., & Roberts, W. (2008). Getting civil about food: The interactions between civil society and the state to advance sustainable food systems in Canada. *Journal of Hunger & Environmental Nutrition*, 3(2–3), 122–144. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19320240802243175>
- Leão, M. M., & Maluf, R. S. (2012). *A construção social de um sistema público de segurança alimentar e nutricional: A experiência brasileira*. ABRANDH.

- Levkoe, C. Z., & Sheedy, A. (2019). A people-centred approach to food policy making: Lessons from Canada's People's Food Policy project. *Journal of Hunger & Environmental Nutrition*, 14(3), 318–338. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19320248.2017.1407724>
- Lund, C. (2016). Rule and rupture: State formation through the production of property and citizenship. *Development and Change*, 47(6), 1199–1228. <https://doi.org/10.1111/dech.12274>
- MacRae, R. (2011). A joined-up food policy for Canada. *Journal of Hunger & Environmental Nutrition*, 6(4), 424–457. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19320248.2011.627297>
- Maluf, R. S. (2006). *Segurança alimentar e fome no Brasil—10 anos da Cúpula Mundial de Alimentação*. CERESAN.
- Maluf, R. S., Burlandy, L., Santarelli, M., Schottz, V., & Speranza, J. S. (2015). Nutrition-sensitive agriculture and the promotion of food and nutrition sovereignty and security in Brazil. *Ciência & Saúde Coletiva*, 20(8), 2303–2312. <https://doi.org/10.1590/1413-81232015208.14032014>
- Maluf, R. S., & Prado, B. (2015). *Atuação brasileira na América Latina e Caribe relacionada com a soberania e segurança alimentar e nutricional*. CERESAN.
- McKay, B., Nehring, R., & Walsh-Dilley, M. (2014). The 'state' of food sovereignty in Latin America: Political projects and alternative pathways in Venezuela, Ecuador, and Bolivia. *The Journal of Peasant Studies*, 41(6), 1175–1200. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03066150.2014.964217>
- McKay, B. (2020). Food sovereignty and neo-extractivism: Limits and possibilities of an alternative development model. *Globalizations*, 17(8), 1386–1404. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14747731.2019.1691798>
- McMichael, P. (2009). A food regime genealogy. *The Journal of Peasant Studies*, 36(1), 139–169. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03066150902820354>
- McMurtry, J. J. (2014). The political economy of procurement. *Canadian Public Policy*, 40(1), 26–38. <https://doi.org/10.3138/cpp.2013-012>
- Menezes, R. G., & Barbosa Jr, R. (2021). Environmental governance under Bolsonaro: Dismantling institutions, curtailing participation, delegitimising opposition. *Zeitschrift Für Vergleichende Politikwissenschaft/ German Journal of Comparative Politics*, 15(3), 229–247. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12286-021-00491-8>
- Müller, A. L., Silva, M. K., & Schneider, S. (2012). A construção das políticas públicas para a agricultura familiar no Brasil: O Programa de Aquisição de Alimentos. *Estudos Sociedade e Agricultura*, 20(1), 106–138.
- National Farmers Union. (2013). *Growing food sovereignty: Healthy food, ecological sustainability, democratic control*. NFU.
- Nehring, R., & Hoffmann, M. (2017). Exporting zero hunger: PAA Africa and the possibilities of food sovereignty with South-South Cooperation. In A. Desmarais, P. Claeys, & A. Trauger (Eds.), *Public policies for food sovereignty: Social movements and the state* (pp. 36–52). Routledge.

- Nehring, R., Miranda, A., & Howe, A. (2017). Making the case for institutional demand: Supporting smallholders through procurement and food assistance programmes. *Global Food Security*, 12, 96–102. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.gfs.2016.09.003>
- Niederle, P., Grisa, C., Picolotto, E. L., & Soldera, D. (2019). Narrative disputes over family-farming public policies in Brazil: Conservative attacks and restricted countermovements. *Latin American Research Review*, 54(3), 707–720. <https://doi.org/10.25222/larr.366>
- Niederle, P., Petersen, P., Coudel, E., Grisa, C., Schmitt, C., Sabourin, E., Schneider, E., Brandenburg, A., & Lamine, C. (2022). Ruptures in the agroecological transitions: Institutional change and policy dismantling in Brazil. *The Journal of Peasant Studies*, 0(0), 1–23. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03066150.2022.2055468>
- Ocasio-Cortez, A. (2019). *Recognizing the duty of the Federal Government to create a Green New Deal*. US Congress. www.congress.gov/bill/116th-congress/house-resolution/109/text
- Pahnke, A. (2018). The contradictions of neo-extractivism and social policy: The role of raw material exports in the Brazilian political crisis. *Third World Quarterly*, 39(8), 1656–1674. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01436597.2018.1428088>
- Pfrimer, M., & Barbosa Jr, R. (2020). Brazil's war on COVID-19: Crisis, not conflict—Doctors, not generals. *Dialogues in Human Geography*, 10(2), 137–140. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2043820620924880>
- Poppendieck, J. (2022). Reformist, progressive, radical: The case for an inclusive alliance. *Canadian Food Studies / La Revue Canadienne des études sur l'alimentation* 9(2), 53-63. <https://doi.org/10.15353/cfs-rcea.v9i2.534>
- Power, E., & McBay, M. (2022). An unconditional basic income is necessary but insufficient to transform towards just food futures. *Canadian Food Studies / La Revue Canadienne Des Études Sur l'alimentation* 9(2), 31-37. <https://doi.org/10.15353/cfs-rcea.v9i2.533>
- Roberts, W. (2014). *Food for city building: A field guide for planners, activists & entrepreneurs*. Hypenotic Inc.
- Rocha, P. V., & Barbosa Jr, R. (2018). Criminalizar é governar: Uma proposta teórica para a compreensão da criminalização dos movimentos sociais do campo no Brasil. *Colombia Internacional*, 93, 205–232. <https://doi.org/10.7440/colombiaint93.2018.08>
- Roman-Alcalá, A. (2020). Agrarian anarchism and authoritarian populism: Towards a more (state-)critical 'critical agrarian studies.' *The Journal of Peasant Studies* 48(2), 1–31. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03066150.2020.1755840>
- Rosol, M., & Barbosa Jr, R. (2021). Moving beyond direct marketing with new mediated models: Evolution of or departure from alternative food networks? *Agriculture and Human Values*, 38, 1021-1039. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10460-021-10210-4>
- Rosol, M., Holt-Giménez, E., Kepkiewicz, L., & Vibert, E. (2022). Towards just food futures: Divergent approaches and possibilities for collaboration across difference. *Canadian Food Studies / La Revue Canadienne Des Études Sur l'alimentation* 9(2), 1-30. <https://doi.org/10.15353/cfs-rcea.v9i2.598>

- Rotz, S. (2017). ‘They took our beads, it was a fair trade, get over it’: Settler colonial logics, racial hierarchies and material dominance in Canadian agriculture. *Geoforum*, 82, 158–169. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.geoforum.2017.04.010>
- Routledge, P., Cumbers, A., & Derickson, K. D. (2018). States of just transition: Realising climate justice through and against the state. *Geoforum*, 88, 78–86. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.geoforum.2017.11.015>
- Sabourin, E., Craviotti, C., & Milhorange, C. (2020). The dismantling of family farming policies in Brazil and Argentina. *International Review of Public Policy*, 2(1), 45–67. <https://doi.org/10.4000/irpp.799>
- Sassen, S. (1996). *Losing control? Sovereignty in an age of globalization*. Columbia University Press.
- Sassen, S. (2010). A savage sorting of winners and losers: Contemporary versions of primitive accumulation. *Globalizations*, 7(1–2), 23–50. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14747731003593091>.
- Sassen, S. (2015). Conclusion: emergent predatory logics. In K. van der Pijl (Ed.), *Handbook of the international political economy of production*, (pp. 524–41). Edward Elgar Publishing.
- Sauer, S. (2017). Rural Brazil during the Lula administrations: Agreements with agribusiness and disputes in agrarian policies. *Latin American Perspectives*, 46(4), 103–121. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0094582X16685176>
- Scoones, I., Edelman, M., Borras Jr, S. M., Hall, R., Wolford, W., & White, B. (2018). Emancipatory rural politics: Confronting authoritarian populism. *The Journal of Peasant Studies*, 45(1), 1–20. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03066150.2017.1339693>
- Selwyn, B. (2021). A green new deal for agriculture: For, within, or against capitalism? *The Journal of Peasant Studies*, 48(4), 1–29. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03066150.2020.1854740>
- Silva, J. G. da, Grossi, M. E. D., & França, C. G. de (Eds.). (2010). *Fome Zero: A experiência brasileira*. MDA.
- Soares, P., Davó-Blanes, M. C., Martinelli, S. S., Melgarejo, L., & Cavalli, S. B. (2017). The effect of new purchase criteria on food procurement for the Brazilian school feeding program. *Appetite*, 108(1), 288–294. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.appet.2016.10.016>
- Soyer, G., & Barbosa Jr, R. (2020). O extrativismo agrário do Governo Bolsonaro a partir das relações Estado-Sociedade. *Revista da ANPEGE*, 16(29), 522–554. <https://doi.org/10.5418/ra2020.v16i29.12553>
- Sparovek, G., Reydon, B. P., Guedes Pinto, L. F., Faria, V., de Freitas, F. L. M., Azevedo-Ramos, C., Gardner, T., Hamamura, C., Rajão, R., Cerignoni, F., Siqueira, G. P., Carvalho, T., Alencar, A., & Ribeiro, V. (2019). Who owns Brazilian lands? *Land Use Policy*, 87, 104062. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.landusepol.2019.104062>
- Stahlbrand, L. (2018). Can values-based food chains advance local and sustainable food systems? Evidence from case studies of university procurement in Canada and the UK. *The International Journal of Sociology of Agriculture and Food*, 24(1), 77–95. <https://doi.org/10.48416/ij saf.v24i1.117>

- Sumner, J., & Stahlbrand, L. (2018). Introduction to the special issue on food procurement. *Canadian Food Studies / La Revue Canadienne Des Études Sur l'alimentation*, 6(1), 1–7. <https://doi.org/10.15353/cfs-rcea.v6i1.350>
- Suschnigg, C. (2012). Food security? Some contradictions associated with corporate donations to Canada's food banks. In M. Koc, J. Sumner, & T. Winson (Eds.), *Critical perspectives in Food Studies* (pp. 223–245). Oxford University Press Canada.
- Swensson, L. F. J., Hunter, D., Schneider, S., & Tartanac, F. (2021). Public food procurement as a game changer for food system transformation. *The Lancet Planetary Health*, 5(8), e495–e496. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S2542-5196\(21\)00176-5](https://doi.org/10.1016/S2542-5196(21)00176-5)
- Trauger, A., Claeys, P., & Desmarais, A. (2017). Can the revolution be institutionalized? In A. Desmarais, P. Claeys, & A. Trauger (Eds.), *Public policies for food sovereignty: Social movements and the state* (pp. 1–15). Routledge.
- Tribunal de Contas da União [TCU]. (2020). *Acórdão 1955/2020-TCU-Plenário* (TC 016.759/2020-6; p. 34). TCU. portal.tcu.gov.br/imprensa/noticias/tcu-acompanha-acoes-relacionadas-a-educacao-basica-durante-a-pandemia.htm
- Triches, R. M., & Grisa, C. (2015). Entre mudanças e conservadorismos: Uma análise dos programas de aquisição de alimentos (PAA e PNAE) a partir da retórica da intransigência. *Revista NERA*, 26(18), 10–27. <https://doi.org/10.47946/rnera.v0i26.3569>
- Veltmeyer, H., & Petras, J. (2014). *The new extractivism: A post-neoliberal development model or imperialism of the twenty-first century?* Zed Books.
- Vergara-Camus, L., & Kay, C. (2017). Agribusiness, peasants, left-wing governments, and the state in Latin America: An overview and theoretical reflections. *Journal of Agrarian Change*, 17(2), 239–257. <https://doi.org/10.1111/joac.12215>
- Vivero-Pol, J. L. (2017). The idea of food as commons or commodity in academia. A systematic review of English scholarly texts. *Journal of Rural Studies*, 53, 182–201. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jrurstud.2017.05.015>
- Wallerstein, I. M. (2004). *World-systems analysis: An introduction*. Duke University Press.
- Weiler, A. M., & Encalada Grez, E. (2022). Rotten asparagus and just-in-time workers: Canadian agricultural industry framing of farm labour and food security during the COVID-19 pandemic. *Canadian Food Studies / La Revue Canadienne des études sur l'alimentation* 9(2), 38-52. <https://doi.org/10.15353/cfs-rcea.v9i2.521>
- World Food Programme [WFP] & National Fund for the Development of Education [FNDE]. (2019). *Financiamento do PNAE*. WFP. centrodeexcelencia.org.br/en/nova-publicacao-sobre-o-financiamento-do-pnae/
- Wilson, A., & Levkoe, C. Z. (2022). Introspecting food movements in Canada: Unpacking tensions towards justice and sustainability. *Canadian Food Studies / La Revue Canadienne Des Études Sur l'alimentation* 9(2), 101-124. <https://doi.org/10.15353/cfs-rcea.v9i2.524>
- Wittman, H. (2015). From protest to policy: The challenges of institutionalizing food sovereignty. *Canadian Food Studies*, 2(2), 174-182. <https://doi.org/10.15353/cfs-rcea.v2i2.99>

- Wittman, H., & Blesh, J. (2017). Food sovereignty and Fome Zero: Connecting public food procurement programmes to sustainable rural development in Brazil. *Journal of Agrarian Change*, 17(1), 81–105. <https://doi.org/10.1111/joac.12131>
- Wittman, H., Desmarais, A., & Wiebe, N. (Eds.). (2011). *Food sovereignty in Canada: Creating just and sustainable food systems*. Fernwood Publishing.
- Wolford, W., Borras Jr, S. M., Hall, R., Scoones, I., & White, B. (2013). Governing global land deals: The role of the state in the rush for land. *Development and Change*, 44(2), 189–210. <https://doi.org/10.1111/dech.12017>
- Zibechi, R. (2010). *Dispersing power: Social movements as anti-state forces*. AK Press.



Original Research Article

Introspecting food movements in Canada: Unpacking tensions towards justice and sustainability

Amanda Wilson^a and Charles Z. Levkoe^{b*}

^a Saint Paul University

^b Lakehead University

Abstract

Over the past decades there has been a notable growth in community-based food systems projects and successes. Despite these advancements, food insecurity, precarious food work, ecological degradation, and corporate conglomeration in the food sector all continue to increase, compounded by the ongoing impacts of white supremacy, patriarchy, and settler colonialism. Recognizing these growing inequities, critical scholars have noted that too many food systems initiatives are overly concerned with influencing individual behaviours and a focus on narrow objectives. Furthermore, many approaches tend to overlook ways that food systems are embedded within political and economic structures that constrain their goals of social and environmental justice. These multiple challenges suggest that food movements are at a crossroads. This paper reflects on this pivotal moment through an analysis of key food movement actors' perspectives on the progress and promises as well as emerging tensions for food movements in Canada. Through a series of interviews with individuals prominent in food movement spaces, we explore key perspectives on the state of food movements and possibilities for future directions. Our findings paint a complex and nuanced portrait of what food movements have accomplished, tease out internal tensions, and identify questions facing their future prospects. The perspectives presented through our findings offer a path to transcend the critiques that position short-term strategic gains in opposition to longer-term systemic change. We suggest that food movements can overcome these challenges by embracing a more radical and expansive vision of social and environmental justice that is deeply embedded within food systems while also looking beyond them.

*Corresponding author: clevkoe@lakeheadu.ca

DOI: 10.15353/cfs-rcea.v9i1.524

ISSN: 2292-3071

Keywords: Food movement; food systems; food sovereignty; food justice; social movement

Introduction

Food movements in Canada¹ have much to celebrate. Over the past decades there has been a notable growth in community-based food systems projects (Elton, 2010; Knezevic et al., 2017), food policy groups (Schiff, 2008; Harper et al., 2009), food systems activism (Miller, 2008; Wittman et al., 2011), farmers' markets, community gardens (Baker, 2004; Beckie et al., 2012), and the creation of the first national food policy for Canada (Levkoe & Wilson, 2019). Despite these advancements, food insecurity (Tarasuk & Mitchell, 2020), precarious food work (Sachs et al., 2014; Weiler et al., 2016), ecological degradation (Qualman, 2019), and corporate conglomeration in the food sector (Fuchs & Clapp, 2009; Howard, 2016) all continue to increase, compounded by the ongoing impacts of white supremacy, patriarchy, and settler colonialism. Recognizing these inequities, critical scholars have noted that too many food systems initiatives are overly concerned with influencing individual behaviours and focus on narrow objectives (Guthman, 2008a; Levkoe, 2011; Sbicca, 2018). Furthermore, many approaches tend to overlook ways that food systems are embedded within political and economic structures that constrain their goals of social and environmental justice (Holt-Giménez & Shattuck, 2011). These multiple challenges suggest that food movements are at a crossroads, with food movement actors facing important decisions about how to move forward. While many of these questions are not new, there is a growing recognition both within and outside food movements of the pressing need to address them more explicitly (see for example, Alkon & Agyeman, 2011; Bohunicky et al., 2021; Elliot et al., 2021).

This themed issue addresses several of these challenges, suggesting that there are different, and at times competing logics at play within different food movements (Rosol et al., 2022, this issue). The stated objectives of this special issue are to better understand these differing approaches, the spaces in which they work, and to explore collaborative possibilities within, between, and beyond food movements. Rather than offer a pragmatic assessment of specific activities or initiatives, this paper contributes a broader reflection on this current moment

¹ In this paper, we frame our discussion through the concept of 'Canadian food movements' We acknowledge that this is a practical and problematic category. Since the arrival of Europeans to what was known by First Nations, Inuit and Metis people as Turtle Island, colonialism has had devastating impacts on Indigenous Peoples and their traditional foodways. The violence of capitalism and settler colonialism that has permeated social and ecological relations has been devastating to all life on this planet. We recognize the assumption that food movements hold national identities or are part of solidifying the continued existence of colonial jurisdictions risks replicating settler-colonial logics. In this paper we focus on the geographical area commonly known as Canada as a way to speak to the collective efforts of food system actors to navigate, shift, and circumvent the various ways in which the state has sought to structure and influence food systems - including committing genocide against Indigenous Peoples and using food systems as a tool of settler colonial expansion.

within food movements through an analysis of key actors' perspectives on the progress and promises, as well as emerging tensions for food movements in Canada. As part of the evaluation of a multi-year collaborative research project that explored community-academic partnerships within food movements, we conducted a series of interviews with prominent individuals in food movement spaces. The interviews aimed to explore key perspectives on the state of food movements in Canada and possibilities for future directions. From this research, we heard reflections of both optimism and uncertainty. Interviewees placed much emphasis on the rapid growth and successes of food movements, yet they also highlighted an undercurrent of concerns and questions related to the overall impact of their efforts and whether they are having the right conversations, using the right tools, and focussing on the right targets. Moreover, what was described as “right” differs among movement actors. In this paper we present two prominent tensions that emerged from the interviews: balancing breadth and depth, and nurturing consensus alongside difference. Second, we suggest two proposals for moving beyond them: an analysis based in both “good food” and “good politics” and looking outside traditional food movement actors and issues.

The interviews suggest a present moment characterized as one where food movements are building bridges and connecting silos, yet at the same time, they are still fragmented, diverse, and disparate. Putting these perspectives of food movement actors into conversation with the challenges facing food systems (and society more broadly), our findings paint a complex and nuanced portrait of what food movements in Canada have accomplished, tease out internal tensions that exist within and among diverse food movements, and identify questions facing their future prospects.

Our decision to focus on the perspectives of food movement actors was in part an effort to build on critiques in the literature, but also to complicate them. Critiques fault food movements for prioritizing short-term strategic gains over longer-term systemic change; yet the perspectives presented through our findings indicate that food movement actors are actively working to transcend them. This is not to suggest that food movement actors have it all figured out; far from it. Through our analysis we suggest that many of the challenges facing food movements might be overcome by embracing more radical and expansive visions of social and environmental justice. This requires critical and collective self-reflection alongside proactive efforts to listen to, learn from, and build strategic alliances with a much broader range of actors and organizations than are traditionally seen within food movements.

A movement of movements

Efforts to create more just and sustainable food systems have been taken up within the literature in a variety of ways. However, much of the literature describes the ways that civil society groups have responded to particular issues facing food systems (e.g., food insecurity, farming practices, exploitation of food workers) and strategies, campaigns, or activities within food movements

(e.g., food policy councils, alternative distribution schemes, school food programs). There is far less analysis that explicitly examines food movements and their strategic approaches to collaboration and action. The lack of analysis poses challenges to understanding the impact and trajectory of food movements, as well as the underlying values and visions of food system transformation that underpin food movements actors' work.

We describe food movements as a collection of formal and informal organizations and individuals actively seeking to ensure food systems are more just and sustainable. They are made up of a range of actors attempting to influence elements from across the food chain (from production, harvesting, and distribution to consumption and waste management) along with the socio-political and ecological relationships that constrain and enable them. In this way, food movements are not a cohesive group with a common goal. Using the term food movements, with an emphasis on their plurality and becoming, is aspirational, recognizing their potential to be strengthened and expanded.

Food movements cannot be understood within a set of fixed boundaries, but rather should be conceived as a fluid and emergent network of relationships and collaborations among individuals and organizations (Levkoe & Wakefield, 2014). Membership as an “insider” within food movements is both a process of self-identification and recognition of legitimacy. Further, it is common for groups of actors to build relationships as part of different, and sometimes overlapping networks, each with a varying set of priorities and political orientations. The wide diversity of food systems, along with the high concentration of formal civil society actors (e.g., non-profit, and charitable organizations), the involvement of food producers and harvesters, small businesses (e.g., co-ops), academics, and para-state actors (e.g., public health workers, nutritionists, policy analysts) further complicate the nature of food movements in Canada.

Indeed, food movements have been described as a “movement of movements,” referring to the wide diversity of individuals, coalitions, organizations, and institutions from different sectors, scales and orientations that come together through networks (Constance et al., 2014; Levkoe 2014). Following from this, we suggest that food movement actors should be distinguished from other food systems actors by their deliberate efforts to challenge the logics of the dominant food system to bring about collective change based on a different set of values and priorities. For instance, our conceptualization does not include businesses that provide a particular food service or product that may be deemed “alternative,” unless they are also involved in related social change efforts (Rosol, 2020).

While there are likely more differences than similarities within food movements, they tend to coalesce around a shared critique of the dominant industrial food system along with the social and environmental implications for people and the planet (Alkon & Guthman, 2017; Desmarais, 2019). Most recently, food movements have increased attention to inter-sectoral issues such as labour (Gray, 2013; Myers & Sbicca, 2015), environmental sustainability (Dale, 2020; Qualman, 2019), race and equity (Reese, 2019; White, 2017), and policy and governance (Desmarais et al., 2017; Andrée et al., 2019). Many actors have used multi-scalar approaches to address issues in a more strategic way. For example, many Indigenous food sovereignty

advocates have worked with international agreements such as the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP),² settler legal systems, regional Treaties, and traditional ecological knowledge to pursue food sovereignty,³ and self-determination (Lowitt et al., 2019; Settee & Shukla, 2020).

Scholars exploring the evolution of food movements have made valuable contributions to theory and practice by developing commentary on their activities (DeLind, 2011; DuPuis & Goodman, 2005; Guthman, 2008b) and heuristic descriptions of their political orientations (Holt-Giménez & Shattuck, 2011). Food movements have also been discussed in relation to their framing discourses that express core common goals and objectives (Schiff & Levkoe, 2014). Food justice is a prominent food movement frame that challenges the ways that the dominant food system has been built on foundations of capitalism, white supremacy, and settler colonialism by proposing a collective vision of justice (Alkon & Agyeman, 2011; Sbicca, 2018). Food sovereignty is another popular food movement frame that emerged from La Via Campesina's articulation of a collective response to the domination of neoliberalism and an alternative vision for grassroots control of food systems (Patel, 2009). These two frames differ significantly from ideas of food security and food charity by focussing their efforts on the problems and solutions underlying food systems that go well beyond food.

However, each of the divergent frames that guide diverse food movements also face questions about their focus and approaches. Scholars have outlined broader critiques of food movements for their penchant for highlighting alternatives to dominant food system activities rather than directly confronting fundamental sources of oppression and exploitation within the dominant food system (Alkon & Guthman, 2017; Myers & Sbicca, 2015). This has raised questions as to precisely what kinds of food futures are being imagined and enacted through food movement discourses and activities. For instance, the promotion and focus on the creation of alternatives to the dominant food system has encouraged individualizing and, at times, seemingly depoliticized approaches (Guthman, 2008b). Despite the ever-growing popularity of alternative food practices, individual and market-focussed solutions are ill-equipped to address deep structural and systemic problems with food systems. Scholars have questioned whether they represent a substantive departure from conventional food systems, and to what degree their creation leads to broader food system transformation (Busa & Garder, 2015; DeLind, 2011; Rosol & Barbosa Jr., 2021). As many critical scholars have noted, the path towards more just and sustainable food systems must be rooted in collaborative efforts that address underlying structures of inequity (Holt-Giménez, 2017; Levkoe, 2011).

² More information can be found via the United Nations website:

<https://www.un.org/development/desa/indigenouspeoples/declaration-on-the-rights-of-indigenous-peoples.html>

³ Food sovereignty is defined by La Via Campesina's as "the right of peoples to healthy and culturally appropriate food produced through ecologically sound and sustainable methods, and their right to define their own food and agriculture systems" (Nyéléni Declaration, 2007). For more information see: <https://viacampesina.org/en/what-are-we-fighting-for/food-sovereignty-and-trade/>

Considering these critiques, scholars and practitioners have lamented the lack of a more confrontational orientation among food movements. According to Alkon and Guthman (2017), the creation of alternatives has become the “dominant mode of food politics” (p. 17) neglecting other avenues of action, particularly those that seek to directly contest existing structures of power within the dominant food system. The focus on alternatives has shifted the politics of food movements and distanced them from broader struggles related to class, race, gender, settler colonialism and power (Bohunicky et al., 2021). Myers and Sbicca (2015) observe, the focus on alternatives “foregrounds a prefigurative politics of flight, exodus or counter power” which leads to “succession from rather than direct confrontation with the conventional agri-food system” (p. 17). Similarly, Holt-Giménez (2017) argues that food movements lack a strong political economy analysis which more explicitly targets capitalism and power in food systems. Of note, while there are actors and organizations engaging in these critical issues, many have not felt included among food movements (Kepkiewicz et al., 2015).

These shifts towards individual and depoliticized food systems activities have resulted in narrowing the horizon of food movements’ possibilities and distracting from underlying issues of injustice and oppression within food systems. In response, critics have called for the cultivation of a more collective and critical food politics within food movement activities and visions of food system transformation (Hammelman et al., 2020; Sibbica, 2018). Alkon and Guthman (2017) urge food movement actors to respond to these critiques by becoming “more politicized, strategic, and confrontational” rather than focussing solely on the celebration and promotion of alternatives (p. 15). Holt-Giménez (2017) suggests there is great potential in bridging efforts that focus on practical, localized interventions, and those that call for broader structural, systemic transformation. It is within the context of these critiques and radical calls to action that we sought to better understand the perspectives and reflections of food movement actors themselves.

Methods

The research presented in this paper draws on a series of interviews with individuals active in food movement spaces across Canada. Participants were initially selected from a pool of respondents who completed a national survey sent through the Food Secure Canada⁴ (FSC) listserv of approximately 10,000 individual and organizational subscribers. The survey was open for responses between December 2017 and January 2018, inviting responses from organizations that self-identify as food movements actors. From the seventy-nine survey respondents, a purposive sampling approach was used to select twenty-six interview participants. All interview respondents had been active in food movements over the past five years, and were decision makers (e.g., directors or managers) within their respective organizations or held prominent

⁴Food Secure Canada is pan-Canadian organization seeking to build more just and sustainable food systems. They are a membership-based organization, with both organizational and individual members. See foodsecurecanada.org

positions within food movement spaces (e.g., event speakers, conference participants, online activity). We also sought to maximize geographic and sectoral diversity (see Table 1). Of the twenty-six participants, eleven were active in academia, eleven in non-profit organizations, one in public health, and three in other community-based research areas. In addition, all but three participants identified as women, three identified as racialized, and all participants had been active in food movements for at least a decade.

Table 1: Interview Participants

Interview participant	Primary Sector	Region	Interview participant	Primary Sector	Region
1	Academic/Farmer/Non-Profit	Ontario	14	Non-Profit	National
2	Non-Profit	BC	15	Public Health	Ontario
3	Research/Regional Non-Profit	Yukon	16	Academic/University	Ontario
4	Non-Profit	Alberta	17	Academic/University	Ontario
5	Academic/University	Alberta	18	Non-Profit	National
6	Academic/University	Ontario	19	Academic/University	Ontario
7	Academic/University	Saskatchewan	20	Academic/University	Ontario
8	Academic/University	Ontario	21	Non-Profit	National
9	Non-Profit	National	22	Academic/University	Ontario
10	Academic/University	British Columbia	23	Non-Profit	Newfoundland
11	Non-Profit	Manitoba	24	Non-Profit	National
12	Policy Analysis/Consultant	British Columbia	25	Non-Profit	Nova Scotia
13	Academic/University	Ontario	26	Non-Profit	Ontario

We conducted this research as two white settler activist-scholars with a history of active participation in diverse food movements. Far from objective bystanders, we are committed to research that actively advances food system transformation. For us, food system transformation

entails a dismantling of oppressive systems, structures and discourses that perpetuate deep inequalities and harm, particularly capitalism, colonialism and racism, and a reimagining of our relationships with food and each other grounded in food sovereignty.

The data collection was initially conducted as part of a larger project through Community First: Impacts of Community Engagement (CFICE), a multi-year project exploring ways to build more effective and equitable collaborations between community and academia. While the survey and interviews covered a broad array of topics, in this paper we focus on data relevant to understanding the current and future context of food movements. The interview schedule was developed by the authors based on current debates in the literature. Interviews were conducted by a graduate research assistant between April and October 2018.

The interview data was analyzed using a thematic coding technique (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Our approach to the data analysis was predominantly open-ended and substantive. The themes were compared with observations from the literature to identify points of alignment and divergence. Care was taken to identify both dominant and dissenting perspectives among respondents. The authors' own experiences and observations within food movements were also used to generate additional insights from the data in subsequent rounds of analysis.

Learning from prominent tensions

Our analysis identified many strengths of food movements in Canada, but what we found most interesting were the areas of tension and discord. In this section, we present two prominent tensions: 1) balancing breadth and depth; and 2) nurturing consensus alongside difference.

The majority of interview participants spoke positively about the trajectory of food movements. However, the ways that participants contextualized this positivity provided valuable insights into how they perceived and understood impacts and accomplishments. Their reflections also pointed to a range of challenges for food movements, limiting their impact and long-term sustainability. In many cases, we found that both the strengths and weaknesses identified by participants had common points of origin. In other words, many of the factors that make food movements vibrant and strong, also created challenges and limited their impact. We describe these contradictory tendencies as tensions that permeate the ways that accomplishments and challenges were named and discussed by participants. For instance, respondents believed food movements had succeeded in building broad public support and widespread awareness of the importance of food as a social, political, and economic issue. Some respondents questioned to what degree this support and awareness had led to tangible impacts; while others wondered whether their growth and popular support had shifted the dominant values of the movements. Several respondents also referred to efforts being made to build relationships across different sectors and issue areas—one respondent referred to this as “silo spanning” (Participant #22). While this silo spanning was framed by some as an accomplishment, several interviewees also

mentioned an ongoing disconnect between movements, suggesting that the diversity of issues and actors within food movements is also a challenge that can impede progress.

Balancing breadth and depth

The first prominent tension that emerged from the interviews speaks to the opportunities and complications that come with a growing, maturing movement. Specifically, respondents wrestled with the ability to maintain a balance between breadth and depth in seeking to move from awareness to impact and in making choices between strategic and idealist orientations.

From awareness to impact

Many interview respondents spoke of an increase in public awareness and understanding of issues affecting food systems. At the same time, several respondents questioned the depth of this understanding, and whether certain issues had received widespread attention without a deeper appreciation for the food system as a whole and the underlying structural challenges shaping that system. In particular, framings of local food and knowing about where and under what conditions your food comes from were frequently identified as gaining in popularity.

Participant #15 suggests that the issues driving the growing interest in food were more individually oriented, such as food safety, personal health, and questions like, “where can I go to find safe food for me and my family?” rather than systemic social and environmental justice themes. While Participant #7 was more optimistic about the depth of public understanding of food systems issues, they acknowledged, “That doesn’t necessarily mean that that thinking gets translated into action.” Participant #26 spoke of significant growth and success in terms of food literacy among the public, and in building local food enterprises and community projects. Despite this growing awareness and on-the-ground work, they felt that systemic change remained elusive, but that the food movement was “poised” to see change on that level.

Greater policy-level impact was frequently named as an important goal of movements, yet respondents had very different assessments of their degree of success. Participant #9 suggested, “food issues are much more on the public and policy agenda,” and Participant #23 noted, “an increase in political interest” across political jurisdictions. Participant #16 expressed a similar sentiment, noting “a huge growing interest around local food” in the past fifteen years, but questioned to what degree this had been translated into political engagement. Participant #18 gave a similar assessment, noting that while there is awareness at the consumer level, the task is to leverage that awareness to political change. Participant #3 described the present moment as “a critical point”, where the federal government is finally interested in advancing policy in relation to food, and Participant #4 was disappointed to see the lack of government attention to food systems, given how much the movement had grown and developed. Further, Participant #8 believed policy makers were showing greater interest, but the impacts had yet to materialize.

Respondents also differed on the strategies to achieve this impact. Some suggested a primarily bottom-up approach, while others advocated for an approach that would see food movements working in greater collaboration with government. Participant #25 suggested the best path forward was a collaborative approach, one that would focus on “relationship building, understanding opportunities, trying to create a working partnership...as opposed to...external demand.” Participant #12 advocated for a greater focus on grassroots engagement within food movements, rather than prioritizing government relationships: “the lesson that I learned was that policy should be thought about from the ground up rather than from the government down.” These comments demonstrate the ways that respondents struggled with how to prioritize different kinds of actions. Increased public awareness is seen as a major achievement, yet it does not necessarily indicate deep understanding of systemic issues, nor does it translate automatically into political change. The translation of growing public awareness into tangible political impact is not straight forward, and food movement actors continue to hold different views on how to negotiate these tensions.

Acting strategically

A second form of this tension emerged through participant’s discussion of shifting movement discourse and orientation. Alongside, and perhaps the result of growing interest and awareness in food systems issues, some respondents noted that food movements were becoming more professionalized with a greater focus on formalized organizational actors, while others noted a shift in the dominant discourse towards a more reformist and self-described strategic orientation. In looking back at its evolution, Participant #24 saw significant change in the nature of food movements, asserting that today, we are “not very grassroots...we are a fairly professional movement.” Participant #1 made a related comment, that the dominant actors within food movements were institutions and organizations, going so far as to suggest, “you need to be in an organization or an institution in order to be involved.” Participant #22 noted an increase in academic programs and certifications related to food systems, meaning that those involved increasingly have formal credentials and training. It was subsequently noted that this may inadvertently further marginalize certain voices or perspectives that draw on lived experience.

Several respondents also made note of a shift in tone within prominent food movement organizations. In particular, some noticed a shift away from a food sovereignty discourse towards more mainstream approaches. Participant #6 saw this as a shift from the language of sovereignty to the language of rights: “Food sovereignty back in 2012 was a big part of the conversation and now, I don’t think I have heard it mentioned other than for Indigenous food sovereignty really in the discussions around the national food policy. And there’s strategic reasons for that.” Here, the suggestion is that food movements have made a strategic decision to frame demands within the right to food, which accepts state authority over grassroots decision making power. This could be because of the greater role played by policy advocacy in movements’ theories of change and a desire to appear as more legitimate to the governments

they seek to influence, or an emphasis on achieving short-term goals while working towards deeper transformation (See Kneen, 2009; Tung et al., 2022, this issue, for a more in-depth discussion of the right to food framing).

Movement professionalization is not unique to food movements (for example, see Markowitz & Tice, 2002). Countless other social movements have gone through a process of consolidation where organizations take on greater roles and responsibilities. However, the way in which professionalization manifests and the consequences of maturation, looks different based on the contexts. Food movements exhibit characteristics common to maturing movements, yet at the same time, many of the organizations within food movements struggle to sustain themselves. Participant #23 reflected that the growing interest in food issues has created an increasingly “crowded sector”, forcing organizations to clarify their roles, skills, and capacities. They framed the key challenge their organization was facing as “figuring out, how do we best build upon and benefit from this growth in interest, engagement, and action from diverse players without losing our voice and power and agency.” Participant #9 made a similar observation, pointing to a “kind of competition” that emerges, as organizations with overlapping mandates compete for funding and resources. While most participants saw growth in very positive terms (as noted in the preceding subsection), there remains tensions between growth and sustainability.

These comments on the increased professionalization of food movements also connect to the increasing focus on policy, which requires particular skills and capabilities. In a synthesis of social movement literature, Taylor and Van Dyke (2004) identify a correlation between professionalization and institutionalization and more conventional or mainstream tactics, particularly lobbying and policy advocacy work. Participant #26 noted that participating in policy “requires a fairly high level of skill... I feel like we are short on that level of participation and resource to participate, but also on the skill of facilitation to do that work in our movement at the regional, provincial and at national levels.” Participant #26 highlights a specific manifestation of this tension—wanting to prioritize policy engagement yet lacking the resources that build an inclusive and participatory approach to this work.

Growth is crucial, and yet it brings challenges and complications. Respondents expressed a desire to see greater policy engagement yet also wanted to retain the grassroots, community-based quality that is characteristic of powerful social movements. Most food movement actors see increased public awareness as a major achievement yet there is not a clear understanding of how this should be accomplished or whether this leads to significant political impact. This is all in the context of movements that have seen many successes, yet at the same time, many food movement actors continue to struggle to achieve long-term organizational sustainability.

Nurturing consensus alongside difference

The second prominent tension highlights the desire to cultivate both consensus and diversity among food movements. Respondents noted the benefit and necessity of diversity and difference

to a thriving movement. At the same time, respondents lamented the lack of shared values and priorities. Some even positioned diversity and difference as a challenge that can weaken movements and their ability to achieve their objectives.

Many respondents suggested that a primary goal of food movements should be to develop the capacity to unify different voices. Participant #16 described food movements as “rich and diverse and multifaceted.” Participant #8 identified the diversity within food movements as an asset because of the opportunity to connect different issues and actors. Even if people come to the movement from very different places, they “still see themselves as a part of the food movement and still see themselves as working towards similar goals.” From this perspective, the plurality of voices within food movements is not an impediment but instead, a potential strength. Participant #20 brought a similar perspective suggesting, “food attracts a wide range of people from different starting points and brings them together. So, it is also conducive to building allies and doing solidarity work and building community.” Participant #11 didn’t see as much convergence taking place but still conceptualized the diversity within the movement as a positive attribute. They reflected that within food movements there are “different communities of interest” each working on their own issues, in ways that may overlap, but without necessarily converging into one single objective: “I think what’s happening is a recognition that those issues don’t necessarily always culminate in some concerted policy direction or program interventions and that sometimes not all—we can’t address all birds with the same style.”

While diversity and difference were framed as beneficial by most participants, they were also identified as potential challenges and weaknesses, leading to a more fragmented movement. Participant #1 framed this as an unresolved dichotomy: “It’s always felt to me like there’s been this bifurcation of interest in social justice parts of food, versus interest in ecological parts of food. And their ability to bring those onto one page, that’s just been a huge problem and a huge frustration that we seem to separate those two things.” Participant #10 suggested that successful movements required a clearly articulated shared goal, something they identified food movements as lacking: “There’s no kind of moral consensus in the food movement because if we go for the ‘let’s make food more affordable’ pathway, then that often can negatively affect farm incomes. And if farmers say, ‘well I want to earn a living wage from my highly priced produce’, which you know they should, then urban poor say, ‘well you’re excluding me from the ability to access the healthy food’.... The food movement doesn’t really know what it wants and some of the things that it wants are contradictory.”

For Participant #10, the problem was not just in identifying common core principles, but in moving from broad values to concrete actions: “You have principles that, I think you could probably say that in Canada many organizations subscribe to the food sovereignty principles.... So, then the question becomes, what’s next?.... Principles are one thing, but then the target of action is the next thing.”

Similarly, Participant #6 suggested that “there’s less of a normative framework that’s guiding the food movement.” They didn’t necessarily see the lack of homogeneity within food movements as a negative thing, but something that posed a challenge for these movements.

Participant #25 echoed this point but felt that this diversity could also pose a problem: “We have multiple food movements, and they don’t always align...people don’t think about food movements the way they might think about workers or civil rights movements.”

For Participant #17, having different perspectives and priorities is to be expected given the complexity of food systems, yet it still frustrating: “The food system is very complex, and we all have different priorities and concerns. Bringing people together and trying to establish a hegemonic alternative to the current practices and policies would require a little bit of patience, a little bit of energy and commitment, dedication, and sometimes we need to learn how to deal with our frustrations, because sometimes it is one step forward, two steps backwards, but we have to understand that, and we should not get discouraged.”

Others framed this as a challenge in knowing how to balance different perspectives and approaches within food movements; for instance, striking the right balance between a critical perspective and a collaborative orientation. Participant #12 also noted that food sovereignty previously played a more prominent role in framing the vision of food system transformation articulated by dominant actors: “FSC’s policy platform was designed around food sovereignty, which is an extremely important concept because it calls the essential nature of food as something more than a commodity. And of course, that’s an anti-capitalist position. FSC lately, is having a bit of difficulty knowing how to hold that.”

They noted this challenge particularly in relation to efforts to work more collaboratively with industry or corporate food actors, and the difficulty in maintaining a strong civil society perspective, or what they label an “activist edge” against much more powerful actors.

Some participants saw signs that movements were finding ways to hold space for both diversity and consensus. Participant #6 described the present moment as “a moment where people who have traditionally worked in silos are starting to see their work as connected.” They specifically named food and labour⁵ as being more connected over the past five years, as well as sustainable agriculture and poverty, and rural and urban perspectives. However, they felt there was still much more work to be done to fully address these divisions. Participant #24 believed that some of these tensions, specifically between anti-poverty and food insecurity advocates hadn’t disappeared, but there was greater understanding and respect that had been built. Even though challenges exist, there is a better understanding of the complexities and how to be cognizant of those remaining tensions.

As the above reflections illustrate, participants saw difference and diversity in complex terms, presenting the heterogeneous nature of food movements not as decidedly good or bad, but as something that brought both benefits and complications. As Participant #13 noted, food movements’ “strengths are in their diversity and its weakness is its diversity.” One way forward is shifting the perception of diversity and difference, along the lines of the reflections shared by Participants #13 and #26, and building strategies that effectively mobilize these differences in

⁵ See Klassen et al., 2022, this issue, for an in-depth discussion of growing connections between food and labour and what possibilities this might hold.

pursuit of shared goals, as opposed to seeing diversity as something that must be solved or overcome. Consensus need not be synonymous with homogeneity. Finding the right balance was perhaps best articulated by Participant #26, who conceptualized the challenge as being able to “move together across diversity.”

The evolution of food movements is forcing actors to grapple with an increasingly complex landscape. On the one hand food movements have grown and expanded, but there is a concern about what is lost in pursuit of that growth and increased impact, and whether the diverse manifestations of the movement can be maintained within this emerging model.

Ways forward: reconciling theories of change

At the heart of the two prominent tensions discussed above are questions about strategies and orientations to social change. This might also be described as differences in theories of change. The concept of a theory of change is used by both scholars and practitioners to refer to the process through which individuals or organizations believe social change occurs—this might include the mechanisms, strategies, and tactics, as well as an ultimate vision. In this final section, we consider what can be learned from participants’ insights to help address these challenges and strengthen the theories of change utilized by food movements. From the prominent tensions we identify two possible directions forward—moving beyond “good food vs. good politics” and looking outside of food systems.

These insights parallel discussions in the literature about the tactics, strategies, and overall political orientations of food movements (Alkon & Guthman, 2017; Myers & Sbicca, 2015; Holt-Giménez, 2017; Holt-Giménez & Shattuck, 2011). While these debates have been primarily focussed on the United States, we can observe somewhat similar dynamics unfolding within Canadian food movements in respect to how actors conceptualize paths of social change but also to how they engage with government and the broader public. Interview respondents were aware of the critiques of food movements and there were clear indications that they were consciously grappling with their implications and seeking productive ways forward.

Rather than positioning orientations as a binary between creating alternatives or adopting a contentious politics against the state (as previously described in the literature), most of our respondents took a more nuanced approach to what a theory of change might entail. The comments emphasizing the need to transcend a dichotomous approach also suggest an evolution in these conversations—a recognition of the need for structural change and empowerment, grassroots movement building, and policy advocacy. Figuring out how to reconcile differences, while maintaining core values within a shared vision of food system transformation may help chart a path forward that embraces a diversity of social change strategies and the orientations needed to get there. In most cases this will not necessarily require achieving commonality but instead holding contradictions with greater care and consideration with sharper analytic tools.

Good food vs. good politics

A point of disagreement among respondents was the scale of change sought (e.g., individual vs. collective) and the kind of analysis of the dominant food system that might inform that change. This was perhaps best articulated by Participant #10 as a kind of antagonism between “good food versus good politics;” reflecting that “I don’t think food is political in this country yet.” For example, they suggested that responding to issues of food access with community gardens or efforts to encourage growing one’s own food “isn’t looking at the structural concerns around food in Canada.” Here community gardens and growing one’s own food are examples of what they see as “good food.” They lamented the lack of emphasis on policies to achieve land reform, or commitment to anti-oppression that they had seen in food movements in other places, examples of “good politics.” This sentiment was echoed by interview Participant #26, who noted a lack of politicization within Canadian food movements. Several participants saw this as a tension between different framings or orientations—a consumer/individual-level focus and a political/policy-focussed engagement. Participant #24 explained, “a lot of people still approach [movement work] in a very personal or family-oriented way, like a consumer approach where they are trying to do things that are the best for individual health or maybe to community, but they are not really engaged in a political way.” Participant #24 later summarized, “I don’t think food is political in this country yet.”

Participant #12 observed that European food movements had a much stronger political analysis, which was not consistently present in the Canadian context: “Some of our European partners are relentless in the strength of their political analysis... I’m not interested in the food movement if it doesn’t have that.” Participant #1 suggested that engagement with social and economic justice was uneven across food movement organizations, with some showing a greater commitment than others. Participant #6 attributed part of this challenge to the long history within Canada of addressing food security through “charity-based models” and “alternative grassroots community initiatives” as opposed to more directly targeting underlying structural issues and the state. They suggested that the challenge was not necessarily the movements themselves (e.g., actors and organizations) but in how they are engaging the broader public to shift the narrative: “I think it’s a challenge for the movement because rights-based approaches or food sovereignty haven’t captured the wider imagination as people still think of food insecurity in those terms.”

Participant #10 believed there was a tendency within food movements to avoid the political arena altogether:

I talked to a lot of young people, primarily urban, who say no, we should not be spending our time on politics. Politics are stupid. Politics are useless. We just need to plant the community garden together and we need to have a potluck. And we need to develop a relationship with our friends and our neighbours and that will protect us. And that’s a very privileged [perspective]. Those people tend to come from quite privileged

backgrounds and other groups that might be advocating for affordable housing or Aboriginal rights to the title.... There's no connections between those groups and so, there's no political weight behind these demands. There's no common political demand for a specific public policy that would support sustainable food systems coming out of the food movement in Canada.

These reflections point to a tension between consumerist/individualistic approaches and more politicized orientations, however, we look to Holt-Giménez and Shattuck's (2011) to recognize that individual actions are an essential part of social and environmental justice and can also be political and deeply radical in their goals. The salient critique here is the need for our actions (whether individual or collective) to be informed by a deeper analysis of the systems and structures that shape food provisioning. Put differently, for food system transformation to occur, good food must be informed by good politics. Good food without good politics will likely only tinker at the edges of the dominant food system or create alternatives for a select few, at best. A strong theory of change must include both good food and good politics—a deeper engagement with structural issues facing food systems while maintaining a sense of possibility and experimentation that make participation in social change efforts relevant and tangible.

Looking beyond food systems

Several respondents suggested that a major challenge to articulating a strong critical analysis of food systems is that there is a tendency to be overly inward looking rather than making connections to broader social and economic issues. For instance, Interview Participant #10 argued that some of the most pressing issues facing food systems are not conceptualized as food movement issues:

One of the biggest threats to food sovereignty in British Columbia, we would argue are the pipelines. The pipelines are opening up areas of traditional food land to pollution, deforestation, and degradation. Threatening marine food security with vastly increasing the potential of oil spills.... But that isn't being presented as a food movement issue. [It is] being presented as an Indigenous issue and an environmental issue. I think individuals in the food movement have absolutely gotten behind that struggle, but there's no one saying 'hey this is an issue that the vast food movement needs to be in solidarity around.'

Similarly, Participant #6 spoke of this challenge in relation to the kinds of solutions proposed to food system problems: "I think one of the challenges we have in Canada is that, at least on questions of food security, the answers are not necessarily in food. And that's a challenge that we

face because we're all interested in food and the way in which food connects people. Those are all important things that we want to work on but they're not always the only solution.”

Participant #17 lamented what they saw as the limitation of sector-specific approaches, as opposed to food movement actors collaborating with other groups and organizations to build broad-based social and environmental justice movements: “We tend to focus [with]in our networks. Sometimes there are advantages of people crossing territories. So, in our networks we may have people who are also working in improvements or changes in the health sector, there are also activists who are working for better housing and better education, and other social justice movements, environmentalists, and people who are working for better libraries, better healthcare. I think we need to collaborate and learn from each other. This kind of collaboration will eventually lead to stronger political movements instead of sector-based social justice approaches.”

Respondents articulated the potential benefits of extending analysis and relationships beyond what is generally understood as part of food systems and who are food system actors. This is one way to strive for that deeper political impact and understanding that respondents spoke to earlier, while also connecting food to structural issues of social and environmental justice that are also common across various social and environmental struggles.

Following the 2018 FSC biannual assembly,⁶ there was a call from Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) in attendance for a greater emphasis on addressing structural racism and settler colonialism within the food system and food movements (see Elliott & Liao, 2019). Attendees also called for bottom-up approaches to policy advocacy that were driven by grassroots communities and rooted in the experiences and leadership of those most marginalized by the dominant food system. In November 2020, FSC held a virtual assembly featuring primarily BIPOC speakers from across Canada sharing their knowledge and experiences in sessions focussing on Black and Indigenous food sovereignty, anti-racist school food programming, allyship in labour rights, and connecting local and global food movements. This shift in focus is an encouraging sign and signals a willingness on behalf of food movement organizations to embrace a more radical and expansive theory of change by centering a more critical and systemic analysis of the food system, and by inviting collaboration and solidarity with other social and environmental justice movements.

Conclusion

In this paper we have presented an introspection of food movements in Canada focussing on how prominent food movement actors understand and frame the current state of movements they are actively involved with by capturing some of the key tensions that have emerged amidst

⁶ A gathering that brings together hundreds of individuals and organizations involved in food movements (see Elliott & Liao, 2019).

significant growth and success. Food movements are increasing in scale and influence and despite being on the precipice of greater impact, a long and difficult journey lies ahead. Concerns include the limits of increased public awareness, the difficulties in translation of awareness, and support into political impact, and building consensus while nurturing diversity and difference.

Naming and unpacking these tensions help to better understand the complex realities facing food movements today. Exploring these tensions underscores some of the opportunities and limitations of food movements and provides direction about collective transformation towards more just and sustainable food systems. Further, considering what participants identified (or did not) through the interviews provides a window into the potential aspirations and barriers facing food movements. Our analysis raises important questions about how a social movement might balance difference and consensus as well as short-term impact and long-term sustainability.

By focussing on these tensions facing food movements, we hope to contribute to the ongoing reflections, debates, and activities among food movement actors and organizations. We see the reflections and proposals offered by actors in this paper as possible openings to address current limitations and cultivate an expanded vision and more nuanced conceptualization of food systems transformation. For instance, instead of framing food systems activities as a binary of “good food” or “good politics,” mutual learning and engagement between the material and the conceptual is an essential space for prefiguration and experimentation. Similarly, the lack of a normative consensus speaks to the diverse perspectives and sectors involved in food movements. Instead of attempting to develop a single point of agreement that risks stifling difference, movements might identify core values and points of affinity that link different experiences, issues, and foci together.

Overall, food movements would benefit from a more critical and holistic analysis of food systems, an approach that integrates different issues and experiences rather than trading one for the other; and one that attends to questions of labour, capital, human-non-human relations, etc., within food systems. Further, there is much that food movement actors can learn from the approaches of other movements engaged in struggles for social and environmental justice, to develop a deeper appreciation for tactics, strategies, and theories of change from outside traditional food movement actors. This is not a question centering one’s gaze inside or outside food movements, but a question of expanding the analysis to broaden the scope of possibility for food system transformation. Some evidence of this was noted by respondents, and several recent examples illustrate promising possibilities⁷ but overall, the connections and relationships between food movements and other social justice movements remain underdeveloped.

Centering a stronger critique of structures and relationships of power within and surrounding food movements could make visible points of connection and solidarity with other

⁷ For example, FoodShare Toronto has established collaborations with both Justicia for Migrant Workers and Foodsters United, drawing powerful connections between poverty, food security and labour rights. See FoodShare 2021 and Hayes 2021. Also, Farmers for Climate Solutions is a new national alliance led by a diversity of farmer and food systems organizations that aim to address the climate crisis (see <https://farmersforclimatesolutions.ca>).

movements, including, for example, migrant justice, fat activism, Indigenous sovereignty, climate justice, global justice, and prison abolitionism. This is particularly important for individuals and organizations expressing alienation from food movements despite working on food systems issues. There is much that food movements can learn from and share with other movements. Thus, our call for introspection and greater reflection is not merely a call inward but rather a call to reach outwards, beyond the particularities of what is often considered to be part of the food system, to other movements that share a related critiques and visions for change. It is also a call to listen to those within food movements that are actively seeking to cultivate these relationships and deeper critiques. In this paper we spoke to individuals who were most prominent in food movement spaces; however, we recognize there are other actors within food movements already engaged in this work but who lack the same prominence, power, and visibility as our sample. We also recognize our own privileged positionality shapes the ways in which we are able to participate in food movements and navigate food movement research. Future research could directly target actors on the margins to assess their perspectives about the current and future state of food movements. In addition, ongoing research introspecting food movements would provide valuable insights on how these tensions shift over time.

While there are no simple solutions, we argue that food movements can overcome current tensions by embracing a theory of change that prioritizes “good food” and “good politics,” and that builds solidarity and relationships of mutual learning with other movements. This would expand the scope of possibilities beyond a binary approach and encourage food movements to make tangible gains while still focussing on problems at the foundations of food systems (e.g., capitalism and private property, white supremacy, settler colonialism, patriarchy).

This is not to insinuate that the path ahead is straightforward. The divergent perspectives and priorities shared by participants in this study illustrate several significant points of contention, each representative of distinct theories and approaches to social change. Food movements and the people and organizations that make up the “network of networks” are being pulled in multiple different directions and are facing significant pressures to both consolidate and expand, step-up and step-back, build consensus, and embrace diversity. Interviewees demonstrated a strong sense of self-reflexivity and critical awareness of the opportunities and tensions facing food movements. Despite the desire for greater collaboration and an expanded theory of change, the path forward remains elusive.

Rather than trying to perpetuate a false vision of a united food movement, we argue that food movements acknowledge, and even embrace these differences, recognizing that many strategies and tactics can complement one another within a common theory of change, working in collaboration rather than as adversaries. This also demands a commitment to embracing a more radical and expansive vision of social change that goes well beyond food and food systems. Doing so will open new possibilities for developing long-term vision and strategies that build alliances and solidarities essential for social and environmental justice.

Acknowledgements: We gratefully acknowledge the time and energy of all the participants that supported this research including the interviewees, members of the Community First: Impacts of Community Engagement (CFICE), and our research assistants. Specifically, we would like to thank Julie Johnston and Karmen Walther for help with the research and analysis along with Marit Rosol, Lauren Kepkiewicz, Ricardo Barbosa Jr., and Estevan Coca for feedback on drafts of the paper. This research was supported with funded from the Social Science and Humanities Research Council of Canada.

References

- Alkon, A. H., & Agyeman, J. (Eds.). (2011). *Cultivating food justice: Race, class, and sustainability*. MIT Press.
- Alkon, A., & Guthman, J. (Eds.). (2017). *The new food activism: Opposition, cooperation, and collective action*. University of California Press.
- Andrée, P., Clark, J. K., Levkoe, C. Z., & Lowitt, K. (2019). *Civil society and social movements in food system governance*. Routledge.
- Baker, L. E. (2004). Tending cultural landscapes and food citizenship in Toronto's community gardens. *Geographical Review*, 94(3), 305-325.
- Beckie, M. A., Kennedy, E. H., & Wittman, H. (2012). Scaling up alternative food networks: Farmers' markets and the role of clustering in western Canada. *Agriculture and Human Values*, 29(3), 333-345.
- Bohunicky, M., Levkoe, C. Z., & Rose, N. (2021). Working for justice in food systems on stolen land? Interrogating food movements confronting settler colonialism. *Canadian Food Studies/La Revue canadienne des études sur l'alimentation*, 8(2).
<https://doi.org/10.15353/cfs-rcea.v8i2.452>
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), 77-101.
- Busa, J., & Garder, R. (2015). Champions of the movement or fair-weather heroes? Individualization and the (a)politics of local food. *Antipode*, 47(2), 323-341.
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/anti.12108>
- Constance, D. H., Renard, M. C., & Rivera-Ferre, M. G. (2014) *Alternative agrifood movements: patterns of convergence and divergence*. Emerald Group Publishing.
- Dale, B. (2020). Alliances for agroecology: from climate change to food system change. *Agroecology and Sustainable Food Systems*, 44(5), 629-652.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/21683565.2019.1697787>
- DeLind, L. B. (2011). Are local food and the local food movement taking us where we want to go? Or are we hitching our wagons to the wrong stars? *Agriculture and Human Values*, 28(2), 273-283. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10460-010-9263-0>

- Desmarais, A. A., Claeys, P., & Trauger, A. (2017). *Public policies for food sovereignty: Social movements and the state*. Routledge.
- Desmarais, A. A. (Ed.). (2019). *Frontline farmers: How the National Farmers Union resists agribusiness and creates our new food future*. Fernwood Publishing.
- DuPuis, E. M., & Goodman, D. (2005). Should we go “home” to eat?: Toward a reflexive politics of localism. *Journal of Rural Studies*, 21(3), 359-371.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jrurstud.2005.05.011>
- Elliott, H., Mulrennan, M., & Cuerrier, A. (2021). Resurgence, refusal, and reconciliation through food movement organizations. *Journal of Agriculture, Food Systems, and Community Development*, 10(3), 1-21. <https://doi.org/10.5304/jafscd.2021.103.009>
- Elliott, H., & Liao, J. (2019). *Food secure Canada questionnaire response summary*. Food secure Canada.
- Elton, S. (2010). *Locavore: From farmers' fields to rooftop gardens-How Canadians are changing the way we eat*. HarperCollins Publishers.
- FoodShare. (2021). *Spotlight on migrant workers: 2021 educator toolkit*. FoodShare.
<https://foodshare.net/custom/uploads/2021/03/The-Great-Big-Crunch-Educator-Toolkit-2021.pdf>
- Fuchs, D., & Clapp, J. (2009). Chapter 10: Corporate power and global agrifood governance: Lessons learned. In D. Fuchs & J. Clapp (Eds.), *Corporate Power in global agrifood governance* (pp. 285-296). MIT Press.
- Gray, M. (2013). *Labor and the locavore: The making of a comprehensive food ethic*. University of California Press.
- Guthman, J. (2008a). Bringing good food to others: Investigating the subjects of alternative food practice. *Cultural Geographies*, 15(4), 431-447.
<https://doi.org/10.1177%2F1474474008094315>
- Guthman, J. (2008b). Neoliberalism and the making of food politics in California. *Geoforum*, 39(3), 1171-1183. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.geoforum.2006.09.002>
- Hammelmann, C., Reynolds, K., & Levkoe, C. Z. (2020). Toward a radical food geography praxis: integrating theory, action, and geographic analysis in pursuit of more equitable and sustainable food systems. *Human Geography*, 13(3), 211-227.
<https://doi.org/10.1177%2F1942778620962034>
- Harper, A., Shattuck, A., Holt-Giménez, E., Alkon, A., & Lambrick, F. (2009). *Food policy councils: Lessons learned*. Food First/Institute for Food and Development Policy.
- Hayes, R. (2021). *The gig is up*. This. <https://this.org/2021/01/07/the-gig-is-up/>
- Holt Giménez, E., & Shattuck, A. (2011). Food crises, food regimes and food movements: rumblings of reform or tides of transformation? *The Journal of Peasant Studies*, 38(1), 109-144. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03066150.2010.538578>
- Holt-Giménez, E. (2017). *A foodie's guide to capitalism: Understanding the political economy of what we eat*. Monthly Review Press.

- Howard, P. H. (2016). *Concentration and power in the food system: Who controls what we eat?* Bloomsbury Publishing.
- Kepkiewicz, L., Chrobok, M., Whetung, M., Cahuas, M., Gill, J., Walker, S., & Wakefield, S. (2015). Beyond inclusion: Toward an anti-colonial food justice praxis. *Journal of Agriculture, Food Systems, and Community Development*, 5(4), 99-104.
<https://doi.org/10.5304/jafscd.2015.054.014>
- Klassen, S., Migrante, F., & Wittman, H. (2022). Sharing the struggle for fairness: exploring the possibilities for solidarity & just labour in organic agriculture. *Canadian Food Studies / La Revue Canadienne des études sur l'alimentation* 9(2), 147-179.
<https://doi.org/10.15353/cfs-rcea.v9i2.536>
- Kneen, B. (2009). *The tyranny of rights*. The Ram's Horn.
- Knezevic, I., Blay-Palmer, A., Levkoe, C. Z., Mount, P., & Nelson, E. (Eds.). (2017). *Nourishing communities: From fractured food systems to transformative pathways*. Springer.
- Levkoe, C. Z. (2011). Towards a transformative food politics. *Local Environment*, 16(7), 687-705. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13549839.2011.592182>
- Levkoe, C. Z. (2014). The food movement in Canada: A social network perspective. *Journal of Peasant Studies*, 41(3), 385-403. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03066150.2014.910766>
- Levkoe, C. Z., & Wakefield, S. (2014). Understanding contemporary networks of environmental and social change: Complex assemblages within Canada's 'food movement.' *Environmental Politics*, 23(2), 302-320. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09644016.2013.818302>
- Levkoe, C. Z., & Wilson, A. (2019). Policy engagement as prefiguration: Experiments in food policy governance through the national food policy dialogue in Canada. In P. Andrée, J. Clark, C. Z. Levkoe, & K. Lowitt (Eds.), *Civil society and social movements in food system governance*, (pp. 101-123). Routledge.
- Lowitt, K., Levkoe, C. Z., Lauzon, R., Ryan, K., & Sayers, C. D. (2019). Indigenous self-determination and food sovereignty through fisheries governance in the Great Lakes Region. In: P. Andrée, J. Clark, C. Z. Levkoe, & K. Lowitt (Eds.), *Civil society and social movements in food system governance* (pp. 145-163). Routledge.
- Markowitz, L. & Tice, K. (2002). Paradoxes of professionalization: Parallel dilemmas in women's organizations in the Americas. *Gender and Society*, 16(2), 941-958
- Miller, S. (2008). *Edible action: Food activism and alternative economics*. Fernwood.
- Myers, J. S., & Sbicca, J. (2015). Bridging good food and good jobs: From secession to confrontation within alternative food movement politics. *Geoforum*, 61, 17-26.
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.geoforum.2015.02.003>
- Nyéleni Declaration, eds. (2007). Declaration of Nyéleni. Sélingué, Mali.
<https://nyeleni.org/spip.php?article290>.
- Patel, R. (2009) Food sovereignty. *The Journal of Peasant Studies*, 36(3), 663-706.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/03066150903143079>

- Qualman, D. (2019). *Civilization critical: Energy, food, nature, and the future*. Fernwood Publishing.
- Reese, A. (2019). *Black food geographies: Race, self-reliance, and food access in Washington, D.C.* University of North Carolina Press.
- Rosol, M. (2020). On the significance of alternative economic practices: Reconceptualizing alterity in alternative food networks. *Economic Geography*, 96(1), 52-76. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00130095.2019.1701430>
- Rosol, M., Holt-Giménez, E., Kepkiewicz, L., & Vibert, E. (2022). Towards just food futures: Divergent approaches and possibilities for collaboration across difference. *Canadian Food Studies / La Revue Canadienne Des Études Sur l'alimentation* 9(2), 1-30. <https://doi.org/10.15353/cfs-rcea.v9i2.598>
- Rosol, M. & Barbosa Jr., R. (2021). Moving beyond direct marketing with new mediated models: evolution of or departure from alternative food networks? *Agriculture and Human Values*, 38, 1021-1039. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10460-021-10210-4>
- Sachs, C., Allen, P., Terman, A. R., Hayden, J., & Hatcher, C. (2014). Front and back of the house: Socio-spatial inequalities in food work. *Agriculture and Human Values*, 31(1), 3-17. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10460-013-9445-7>
- Sbbica, J. (2018). *Food justice now! Deepening the roots of social struggle*. University of Minnesota Press
- Schiff, R. (2008). The role of food policy councils in developing sustainable food systems. *Journal of Hunger & Environmental Nutrition*, 3(2-3), 206-228. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19320240802244017>
- Schiff, R., & Levkoe, C. Z. (2014). From disparate action to collective mobilization: collective action frames and the Canadian food movement. In L. Leonard & S. Bury Kedzior (Eds.), *Occupy the earth: Global environmental movements* (pp. 225-223). Emerald Group Publishing Limited.
- Settee, P., & Shukla, S. (Eds.). (2020). *Indigenous food systems: Concepts, cases, and conversations*. Canadian Scholars Press.
- Tarasuk V, & Mitchell A. (2020) *Household food insecurity in Canada, 2017-18*. PROOF. <https://proof.utoronto.ca/resources/proof-annual-reports/household-food-insecurity-in-canada-2017-2018/>
- Taylor, V. & Van Dyke, L. (2004). “Get up, stand up”: Tactical repertoires of social movements. In D. Snow, S. A. Soule, & H. Kriesi (Eds.), *The Blackwell Companion to Social Movements* (pp. 262-293). Blackwell Publishing Ltd.
- Tung, A., Redwood, R. R., & Cloutier, D. (2022). Breadlines, victory gardens, or human rights?: examining food insecurity discourses in Canada. *Canadian Food Studies / La Revue Canadienne des études sur l'alimentation* 9(2), 249-276. <https://doi.org/10.15353/cfs-rcea.v9i2.530>

- Weiler, A. M., Otero, G., & Wittman, H. (2016). Rock stars and bad apples: Moral economies of alternative food networks and precarious farm work regimes. *Antipode*, 48(4), 1140-1162. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/anti.12221>
- White, M. M. (2017). Freedom's seeds: Reflections of food, race, and community development: Voices of the food movement in Detroit. *Journal of Agriculture, Food Systems, and Community Development*, 7(2), 5-7. <https://doi.org/10.5304/jafscd.2017.072.009>
- Wittman, H., Desmarais, A.A. & N. Wiebe, N. (2011). *Food Sovereignty in Canada: Creating Just and Sustainable Food Systems*. Halifax: Fernwood Publishing.



Original Research Article

'Biotechnologizing' or 'democratizing'? Unraveling the diversity of resistance to GMOs in Guatemala

Carrie Seay-Fleming*

University of Colorado Boulder

Abstract

Until 2019, Guatemala upheld a de-facto moratorium on GMOs. The ban has been attributed to broad-based social resistance and the unlikely alliances galvanized by the issue. Recent legislation, however, has been met with little resistance. In this paper, I show how the tensions between anti-GM actors and their interactions on the ground help to explain this turn of events in Guatemala, and—more broadly— contributes to our understanding of how biotechnology advances despite significant resistance. Drawing on interviews and ethnographic observation, I demonstrate how urban, professional class *Ladinos* who oppose GMOs draw on scientific and technical arguments divorced from broader political-economic critiques. Meanwhile, *campesino* and indigenous activists center their resistance within broader structures of oppression such as colonialism, racism, and capitalism. Specifically, I show how 'biotechnologizing' is employed in problematic ways, not only by pro-GMO coalitions—as other scholarship suggests—but also by anti-GM allies. This case contributes to our understanding of how anti-GMO movement frames get constructed in local contexts, and the tensions that arise between anti-GM groups, revealing significant impediments to creating a more just food future in Guatemala.

Keywords: Genetically modified organisms; alternative food movements; food sovereignty; Guatemala; social movements; scientism; peasant social movements

*Corresponding author: case5484@colorado.edu

DOI: 10.15353/cfs-rcea.v9i2.528

ISSN: 2292-3071

Introduction

On September 2, 2014, an estimated 120,000 protestors halted traffic on Guatemala's Pan-American Highway to demand the repeal of a new law permitting genetically modified (GM) seeds in Guatemalan markets. A month later Congress repealed the law, signaling a remarkable victory for protestors. The success of the protests was attributed to the way the movement drew together unusual allies, uniquely transcending age, class, ethnic, and geographic divides that otherwise pervade society. Guatemalan scholars hailed the victory as an opening for democracy and an awakening of the dormant power of civil society (Grandia, 2017). Five years later, however, a new regulation took effect which allows for the importation, commercialization, and planting of GM seeds. A small group of activists filed a complaint with the constitutional court and were granted a temporary suspension, but their appeal was ultimately overturned (Expediente 6767-2019). This decision has thus far not generated mass mobilizations. This leaves unanswered questions about why diverse actors coalesce around the issue of genetically modified organisms (GMOs) and what impediments they face in demonstrating long-term, transformative change.

GMOs, rather than simply a technology that produces higher or better yields, fundamentally alter the relations of production (Kloppenborg, 2010; Yapa, 1993). Like any privatized seed, GMOs must be purchased perennially rather than saved and reproduced freely from year to year. Some GM plants, like those modified to be herbicide-resistant, require the increased application of agro-chemicals. By these means, and the threat of self-pollination with native varieties inherent to some GM crops, GMOs can degrade biological diversity. Scholars have considered GMOs an instance of “accumulation by dispossession” (Harvey, 2003) because they simultaneously dispossess farmers from their means of production and open a new path for capital accumulation. Thus as Kloppenborg (2010) writes, “Who controls the seed gains a substantial measure of control over the shape of the entire food system” (p. 368). Genetically engineered seeds are a unique battleground with exceptionally high stakes.

GMOs has been heavily theorized. In their work on food regimes, Friedmann and McMichael (1989) trace how capitalism, the state, industry, and agriculture have co-evolved. Pechlaner and Otero (2010) have labeled our current food regime the “neoliberal food regime”, calling attention to the way our food system has been reshaped by neoliberalism—a set of practices based on the belief that “human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills” (Harvey, 2005 p. 2) within a system of strong private-property rights, free-market, and free trade. Trade agreements and global legal frameworks are increasingly important tools facilitating the corporate capture of genetic diversity (Kloppenborg, 2014; Felicien et al., 2018). For the way GM crops are patented on behalf of transnational corporations and facilitated by global politics, they have been framed as central to the neoliberal food regime and been called the “sharpest technological expression of the neoliberal food regime” (Otero & Lapegna, 2016, p. 671).

Because GMOs are illustrative of neoliberalization and accumulation by dispossession, they tend to be conceptualized from this lens. This gaze also permeates scholarship about anti-GMO social movements. Specifically in the global South, mobilizations against GMOs are often framed as antithetical to these processes—as anti-neoliberal and anti-capitalist. Dominant explanations of GMO resistance shed light on various aspects of these movements, but they cohere in their baseline assumption that actors mobilize against GMOs as a response to neoliberal encroachment. This framing accurately describes why some actors resist the technology. However, as others have pointed out, agrarian social movements are far from homogenous (Lapegna, 2014; Müller, 2006).

Diverse critiques of GMOs and repertoires of protests have been identified (Scoones, 2008; Wainwright & Mercer, 2008). The framing of opposition can take on many forms, both narrow and wide (Scoones, 2008). At the narrow end of GMO critiques, scholars have identified a reformist, “biosafety” framing, that reduces the issue to scientific or technical criteria, rather than the livelihood concerns of rural communities, property rights, or unequal power relations (Kinchy et al., 2008; Levidow & Carr, 1997). Rather than anti-neoliberal or anti-capitalist, this discursive framing privileges the role of experts and can marginalize broader socio-economic critiques of the technology. This problem framing is so resonant, Levidow (1998) coined the term “biotechnologizing” to describe these approaches.

Biotechnologizing, however, is most often described as a technique of governance, rather than a social movement frame. Governments or scientists who biotechnologize have a pro-GMO agenda and clear political and material interests. They biotechnologize to coercive ends—to co-opt more radical goals of social movement actors. What deserves attention, I argue, are the ways biotechnologizing can be employed in a problematic way, not only by pro-GMO coalitions, but also by anti-GM allies. Rather than a deliberate attempt to channel dissent, well-intentioned “expert” social movement actors can also derail the broader goals of less powerful movement allies. Extending the concept of biotechnologizing can help explain tensions that exist within anti-GMO social movements, and the unfulfilled achievements of once celebrated movements—like in Guatemala.

Guatemala is a rich case for asking: Why do people contest GMOs? How are movement dynamics shaped by local considerations and contexts? What tensions arise when movement logics are diverse? How might tensions impact the movement’s ability to challenge the dominant agri-food paradigm? In the paper that follows, I first present dominant theories about GMO debates as a struggle over capitalist expansion and neoliberalism. I then review a smaller body of science and technology studies (STS) scholarship which complicates this framing. Drawing on this scholarship, I use interviews and ethnographic observation to show how experts employ “technical” discourses to describe their resistance to aspects of GMOs, aligning themselves with the rule of law, science, and common sense. Rather than being a rejection of capitalist logic or

anti-neoliberal, this discourse frames the issue as primarily one of “biosafety,”¹ amenable to technocratic reforms. This perspective stands in stark contrast to Indigenous and *campesino* activists who articulate their resistance within a broader, anti-neoliberal struggle.

Reproaching the neoliberal food regime

In this section I review three distinct but interrelated dominant characterizations of anti-GMO struggles: 1) struggles for “seed sovereignty”; 2) reactionary “double movements”; 3) and expressions of “moral economy”. These existing explanations shed light on various aspects of anti-GMO social movements, but cohere in framing movements as a reproach of the neoliberal food regime. Following a review of these explanations, I suggest limitations to the dominant narrative.

Consistent with the dominant framing of GMOs as a process of accumulation by dispossession typical of the neoliberal food regime, scholars have often described anti-GMO social movements as a struggle against these processes. Jack Kloppenberg, who has written extensively on the topic of agricultural biotechnology, employs this framing. He writes, “The seed has become a key nexus in awareness of and opposition to the neoliberal project of restructuring the social and natural worlds around the narrow logic of the market” (Kloppenberg, 2014, p.1233). From this perspective, anti-GMO struggles correspond with what transnational peasant networks (TPNs) like La Via Campesina have called struggles for “seed sovereignty” (Müller, 2020; Peschard & Randeria, 2019). These organizations define seed sovereignty as the right to plant, share, and breed new plant varieties with existing seeds, and are diametrically opposed to both intellectual property rights and GMOs on these grounds (Kloppenberg, 2014).

There is good reason to read anti-GMO movements as struggles for seed sovereignty. For La Via Campesina, which emerged in the 1990s in direct response to the globalization of agriculture (Edelman, 2014), GMOs are just one battleground in the larger struggle against globalization, commodification, and neoliberalism. Across Latin America, peasant organizations have drawn on TPN discourse to contest GMOs and other extractive projects (Escobar & Fitting, 2016; Fitting, 2014; Klepek, 2012; Motta, 2014). GMOs therefore often serve as a specific link to anti-globalization, anti-trade, anti-neoliberalism, and other transnational movements and struggles. While the seed sovereignty framing may help to explain peasant and Indigenous resistance to GMOs, scholars have issued caution about relying too heavily on transnational movements to explain national-level manifestations (Baletti et al., 2008; Borras Jr., 2010; Lapegna, 2014). Arguments that make universalizing claims about seed sovereignty fail to account for the heterogeneity of actors who are often represented in anti-GMO movements.

¹ Biosafety is one aspect of GMO regulation focussed on ameliorating the threat of genetic contamination. Biosafety concerns focus on the safe transport, tracking and handling of genetically modified seeds, rather than the logic of genetic modification more generally (UNEP N.d.)

In light of these diverse, large-scale movements, many scholars have drawn on Karl Polanyi's (1944) concept of "double movement" to help explain GMO resistance (Carroll, 2016; Levien, 2007; Wittman, 2009). Double movement describes a dialectic pattern of unregulated capital accumulation followed by reactionary counter movements. Polanyi describes how trying to embed the natural environment into markets often has deleterious effects, triggering society to act in self-protection (Polanyi, 1944). Polanyi (1944) notes that counter-movements will include "support of those most immediately affected by the deleterious actions of the market—primarily, but not exclusively, the working and landed classes" (p. 138). Polanyi is less interested in which class takes the lead in social movements, as in all cases movements are not motivated by self-interest but "out of the functional need for society to protect itself" (Levien, 2007, p. 125). The concept of double movement helps to account for the broad alliances which have formed to contest GMOs because, as Carroll (2016) concludes, "Self-protection does not need to be part of a deeply held commitment to radical transformation. It can just as easily come as a reaction to the potentially adverse environmental and safety consequences of treating nature like a commodity" (p. 19).

Polanyi, however, describes counter-movements as emerging mechanically and spontaneously, neglecting how movements are organized and how people differently affected by the deleterious effects of the market are brought together around a political project (Levien, 2007). Some scholars have filled in these gaps drawing on the concept of "moral economy" (Scott, 1976; Thompson, 1963) to explain how diverse actors coalesce around the issue of GMOs. Moral economy describes how cultural norms guide economic life, often even at the expense of profit. Intra and interclass reciprocal relations over time produce widely held conceptions of justice or right action, about market relations, but also about the optimal organization of society more broadly (Edelman, 2005; Scott, 1976; Wolford, 2005). The concept of moral economy helps to explain how counter-movements, rather than emerging spontaneously, are constructed from these arrangements and ideologies.

Theories of moral economy have been influential in explaining GMO social movements in Latin America, highlighting the ways they threaten cultural and traditional lifeways. Latin American activists draw on maize as a symbol of place-specific material and moral significance (Fitting, 2010; Fitting, 2014; Grandia, 2017; Klepek, 2012). Klepek (2012) describes how the perceived threat of GMOs to traditional seed saving and exchange has shaped popular concern over the technology in Guatemala. Fitting (2014) describes how campaigns against GMOs in Mexico and Colombia highlight the cultural meaning of maize and by doing so "generate solidarity among different types of groups and individuals" (p. 176). Grandia (2017), expressly attributes the protestors' motivation and success to a moral economy of maize. She writes, "The material, moral, and emotional significance of maize helped galvanize and motivate people who may have never been politically active to make comments or take direction against Monsanto.... Maize prices, maize seed, and maize markets are issues around which thousands of Guatemalans—from both the political right and the left—can mobilize against the injustices they perceive from neoliberalism writ large" (Grandia, 2017, p. 78-79). In this quote, Grandia outlines

the role of moral economy while conjuring a depiction of a Polanyian double movement against injustices “writ large,” invoking a struggle against neoliberalism. While this research also finds moral economy useful when analyzing campesino and Indigenous opposition to GM crops in Guatemala, I argue it is less salient for explaining the participation of middle-class and expert actors.

Here I treat these explanations (seed sovereignty, double movement, and moral economy) separately, however, they are often used simultaneously to explain different aspects of the same movement. While each explanation sheds a different light on GMO resistance, they cohere in their baseline assumption that actors mobilize against GMOs as a reproach of the encroaching neoliberal food regime—whether expressly anti-neoliberal as TPNs articulate, a more abstracted threat in the Polanyian sense, or in an explicit defense of culture.

Science, scientism, and biotechnologizing

In contrast to the dominant characterization, in which anti-GMO movements in the global South are assigned a broad anti-neoliberal motive, some framings of the GMO problematic are quite narrow and may work at cross-purposes with wider-ranging movement goals. Here I review a smaller body of STS scholarship about the “biotechnologizing” of GMO debates and explain how this study moves this work forward.

There are many anti-GMO activists whose concerns are specific to the technology or aspects of it. Writing about one of the first widely publicized GMO disputes in Latin America, Wainwright and Mercer (2008) describe how debates in Mexico became narrowly fixated on the gene “scale of criticism”. Following Quist and Chapela’s (2001) discovery of transgenic DNA in native maize landraces, scientists set out to disprove their findings, to specify the likelihood of introgression, and to debate the reliability of certain data—producing scientific fodder for both sides. Activists involved in the Network in Defense of Maize, an heterogeneous group of NGOs, Indigenous community organizations, researchers and campesino groups, emulated this discourse, couching their critiques in terms of “biosafety” and introgression (Kinchy, 2012). While this framing does not encapsulate the range of Mexican activists’ concerns, the terrain of the debates in Mexico were significantly shaped by these high-profile scientific debates—circumscribing the space for activists.

This resonates with what other scholars have shown about biosafety. Since the passage of the Cartagena Biosafety Protocol in 2003, countries have more room to regulate trade without proof they cause harm, in the name of environmental protection (Kinchy 2012). By focussing solely on biosafety, however, the Protocol legitimizes only a small subset of concerns about GMOs—those that constitute threats to biodiversity and can be assessed through scientific analysis (Kinchy, 2012). This framing privileges the role of scientific knowledge and can marginalize broader socioeconomic critiques of the technology (Andréé, 1997; Kinchy, 2012; Levidow, 1998; Wynne, 2001).

The Protocol also encourages public participation in crafting national biosafety regulation, following broader trends toward “democratizing technology” (Levidow, 1998). While public participation in biosafety debates can create new opportunities to voice critiques, scholars have shown how the potential of such exercises are limited by a narrow problem-definition of risk and safety. Rather than open debate to broader questions, for example whether to allow GMOs, emphasis is placed on how to anticipate, prevent, or ameliorate potential negative effects of new technology. By focussing participatory exercises on risk management, they presuppose technocratic policy solutions. Les Levidow (1998) coined the term “biotechnologizing democracy” as opposed to “democratizing biotechnology,” to describe how scientific or technical discourse restricts “debate to a pre-defined set of scenarios about biotech futures rather than engage broader social and ethical concerns” (Newell, 2009, p. 365).

Biotechnologizing represents one instance of the scientization of politics—the increasing prominence of science-based technology regulation within the context of neoliberalization (Moore et al., 2011). Scientism, the ideology that helps drive this process, assumes policy is best dictated by scientific reasoning, since science is presumed to be apolitical, “transcend human values and interests and to provide objective answers upon which all can agree” (Kinchy et al., 2008, p. 156). The emphasis of this scholarship is the way states, scientists, and corporate elites set agendas, frame problems, and “biotechnologize democracy.” In other words, scientization is a “strategic political project, pursued by actors who stand to gain by constructing matters of social significance in a narrowly technical way” (Kinchy, 2012, p. 32). Rather than a social movement frame, biotechnologizing is a technique of governance to foreclose debate. In the case where social movement actors employ scientific or technical framing, it’s because they are forced to accept the terms of the debate set by the pro-GMO position, not because this logic is endemic to the movement (Scoones, 2008; Kinchy, 2012). In the case of Guatemala, I argue that biotechnologizing can be employed in problematic ways, not only by pro-GMO coalitions, but also by anti-GMO allies.

Methods

To understand this complexity of resistance to GMOs in Guatemala, I draw on qualitative data collected over a two-month period in 2018 and 2019, including twenty hours of ethnographic observations and twenty-one in-depth, semi-structured interviews.² Many individuals I interviewed were also participants in meetings and events I observed. This mix of qualitative methods allowed me to gain an understanding of how diverse actors articulate their resistance to GMOs when asked in a confidential interview, how they discussed them amongst groups of

² All interviews took place in 2018 and conducted in person, except for one which was conducted over Skype. Interviews were conducted in Spanish, lasted up to two hours, and were audio-recorded. All quotes used are from my own data which I translated from Spanish to English. Participants have been given pseudonyms.

similarly situated actors, as well as how they negotiated these opinions with actors who have diverging opinions and social identities.

This paper draws most heavily on interview data with individuals who have been active in resisting GMOs—who either participated in street protests, published formal denouncements, or otherwise publicly expressed their resistance to the Monsanto Law in 2014. Interview participants included academics, Indigenous leaders, environmentalists, government actors, agronomists, and *campesinos*. In the results section, I use two primary categories to organize these actors. I term one group “experts,” which includes professors, government actors, and agronomists—in other words, “credentialed experts” (Williams & Moore, 2019), people with formal degrees, or formal job titles. The term expert also describes the way credentials allowed these actors to weigh in on GMO debates in ways the lay public would not. This category describes eleven of the participants, the majority of whom also identify as *Ladino*, signaling their non-Indigenous or mixed Indigenous and European ancestry, and are urban residents. The other ten participants I categorize as *campesinos*. These actors primarily identify as *campesino* or Indigenous and draw on this identity to describe their opinions about GMOs. In a few cases, these categories are not entirely discrete. For example, some activists who represent the Network for the Defense of Food Sovereignty, made up of largely Indigenous *campesino* members, are also professional agronomists. However, given their affiliation with activist networks, they are not ascribed expert status. Thus, I use the category “expert,” not to reify their superior knowledge, but to describe the way actors were empowered or disempowered in their interactions with others. Further, categorial divides such as *Ladino*/Indigenous, urban/rural, while crude, have both historical significance and contemporary salience—as I attempt to make clear.

Genetically modified organisms in Guatemala

Guatemala and Southern Mexico are the birthplace of and contemporary centre of maize genetic diversity, a plant whose remarkable role in the world economy is well documented (Kloppenber, 2005; Warman & Westrate, 2003). Genetic diversity in the world’s major food crops is critical to global food supply, hence as Isakson (2009) argues, “the cultivation of agrobiodiversity and, consequently, global food security, is contingent upon the ‘food sovereignty’ of peasant farmers” in places like Guatemala (Isakson, 2009, p. 726). Perhaps because of these high stakes, the impacts and potential threats of genetic engineering in Guatemala have long been forewarned and theorized (Grandia, 2014; Klepek, 2011, 2012; Soleri et al., 2005).

Guatemala has largely followed broader trends towards neoliberal agricultural restructuring, including the dismantling of state institutions and interventions, characteristic of much of Latin America since the 1980s (Copeland, 2019; Isakson, 2014). In combination with other forces, this neoliberal restructuring has resulted in some of the highest levels of food

insecurity in the western hemisphere, increasing reliance on foreign aid and international cooperation (Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations [FAO], 2014; World Food Program, 2017). The thirty-six year civil conflict, which formally ended with the 1996 peace accords, left many Indigenous communities devastated (Handy, 1984). The roughly two decades that have passed since have been marked by an “internationally assisted transition to multicultural free-market democracy” (Copeland, 2014, p. 305). In contrast to Bolivia and Ecuador (other Latin American countries with large Indigenous populations) who have made significant inroads to challenging neoliberal regimes, Indigenous politics in Guatemala have been characterized as divisive and powerless (Copeland, 2014). Some attribute these circumstances to the Peace Accords which awarded minimal new rights to the country’s Indigenous population. These rights were mostly relegated to arenas like education and language, eschewing larger economic and structural reform (Hale, 2002; 2005). This palatable form of multiculturalism has pacified some, diminishing more leftist Mayan movements and ultimately limiting their potential (Hale, 2002; 2005). As Klepek (2012) has pointed out, however, the danger in “focussing solely on the fragmentation of past and contemporary Guatemala social movements is ignoring evidence of and possibilities for more transformative agrarian (and other) politics” (p. 314).

Anti-GMO mobilization is one arena where this hope of transformation is apparent. Initial activism in Guatemala took off after Quist and Chapela (2001) detected transgenic DNA in native maize landraces in neighboring Mexico. Early forms of resistance emerged from far left, politically engaged Mayan leaders and a burgeoning network of organizations united as the Network for the Defense of Food Sovereignty (REDSAG). This resistance was embroiled in debates about transgenic maize and soy arriving as food aid from the United States, and larger conversations about the management of biodiversity, promoted by the United Nations (Klepek, 2012). Guatemala first proposed a draft law to allow GMOs in 2006, based on the Union for the Protection of New Plant Varieties (UPOV), an international convention that codifies intellectual property for plant breeders—a requirement of the Central American Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA) with the United States. This attempt was met with resistance and legislative failings (Klepek, 2012).

In July 2014, the Guatemalan Congress passed a law named the Law for the Protection of New Plant Varieties (Grandia, 2017). The law prohibited the replanting, transportation, or selling of privatized seeds without permission, and would have made these actions punishable by a fine of Q1000–10,000 (\$130–\$1,300) and up to four years in prison. The law included text regarding the handling, transport, and use of GMOs, paving the entrance for GM seed to Guatemalan markets. The law was nicknamed *la ley Monsanto* (the Monsanto Law) and word spread over the next two months, culminating in a protest on September 2, 2014 when an estimated 120,000 protestors took to the streets. Under intense criticism, Congress voted to repeal the law, signaling a remarkable victory for the protestors (Grandia, 2017). In diverging from trends toward neoliberal agricultural restructuring, Guatemala has gone against the grain, both of its own

expected trajectory and larger regional and global trends. This is especially surprising given the way Guatemala's post-conflict landscape has been characterized in the literature.

Despite evidence of broader anti-GMO sentiments, most accounts prior to the 2014 mobilizations suggest the issue was uniquely a concern for the country's Indigenous and peasant citizens. In fact, just a few years before the 2014 protests, Klepek (2011) documented concerns about GMO policies exacerbating class tensions. This pre-2014 scholarship framed GMO resistance as primarily a Mayan movement (Grandia, 2014; Klepek, 2011, 2012). In contrast, accounts of the 2014 mobilizations against the Monsanto Law suggest the movement's success hinged on a powerful and diverse coalition, inspiring action from all sides of ethnic and class lines. Images of the protests show urban foodies, schoolteachers, peasants in straw hats, and Maya women carrying maize stalks out in the streets. Hackers temporarily shut down government websites (Grandia, 2017), while professional organizations of university professors and agronomists published official communications denouncing the law.

Existing explanations for why this heterogeneous bloc emerged largely emulate the dominant "reproach of the neoliberal food regime" framing previously outlined, leaning heavily on the moral economy of maize in galvanizing anti-GMO resistance (Grandia, 2017). However, as I show, this framing overlooks important differences between actors and fails to fully explain the participation of some social groups, particularly professional class, urban *Ladinos* (non-Indigenous Guatemalans). This is especially evident when taking into account how these debates continue to unfold.

On October 1, 2019, a new Ministerial Resolution proposed by the Ministry of the Economy took effect which officially allows for the importation, commercialization, and sowing of GM seeds. The resolution (No. 60-2019) enacts a Technical Regulation (RT 65.06.01:18) proposed by the Ministry of Agriculture. Written as a customs agreement with Honduras and El Salvador, the regulation itself is largely void of details, allowing each party to establish its own rules (Reglamento Técnico 65.06.01:18). The Ministry of the Economy has since passed a ministerial agreement to this end and the Ministry of Agriculture put forth a "technical instrument" to outline procedures for regulating GMOs (Acuerdo Ministerial No. 270, 2019). These accompanying agreements include language about biosafety, absent from the 2014 Monsanto Law. Principally, they establish an Agricultural Biosafety Technical Committee to evaluate applications to use GMOs and outline the procedures by which applications should be scrutinized. The Technical Committee's main job is to make "scientifically and technically" based decisions about the risk that each application poses to human health and biodiversity. The manual assigns the National Council of Protected Areas authority to make decisions regarding GMOs in protected areas and promises the Ministry of Agriculture will conduct a "scientific study...to define areas that are centres of origin areas of genetic diversity"—though it does not state when the study will take place or what this designation will mean for GMO regulation (Acuerdo Ministerial 271-2019:47).

Another key difference between the 2014 and the 2019 legislation is that the new regulation does not specify sanctions for those who reproduce GM seeds unlawfully. The

technical manual put out by MAGA, however, mentions in vague language “legal and disciplinary measures” “deemed necessary” for those caught planting GM seeds without prior permission of the Biosafety Committee. Aside from this softening of sanctions and the inclusion of biosafety rhetoric, in all other respects, it resembles the 2014 Monsanto Law. Yet, it has not drawn the opposition—in terms of size and diversity—that prior legislation did. This variation between 2014 and 2019 raises questions about why diverse actors coalesce around the issue of GMOs in particular contexts and what impediments they face in demonstrating long-term, transformative change.

Members of REDSAG and grassroots Indigenous groups organized as the National Alliance for Biodiversity Protection have mounted campaigns against the law, appealing to the Constitutional Court to make a decisive decision once again against GMOs. While they achieved a temporary injunction, suspending implementation of the legislation, the injunction was lifted, and the legislation enacted again in February 2021. What little media attention the issue has received in dominant news outlets, has been unambiguously in favor of the legislation (Bolaños, 2019; Bolaños, 2020). Social media has largely been silent—outside of the networks already mentioned. Urban, professional class interest in the issue has seemingly vanished. As I’ll argue, strengthening of the “biosafety” language may have pacified some within the anti-GMO bloc and may help to explain this twist of fate for GMOs in Guatemala.

‘Biotechnologizing’

In this section I outline important differences between groups of anti-GMO activists, differentiating between those who could be called “experts,” and Indigenous and *campesino* activists. I focus on the ways people described their understanding of GMOs, their concerns about the technology, their accounts of events, and how they described themselves in relation to other actors. First, I describe a “technical” or “scientific” discourse often employed by experts.

One middle-aged, *Ladino*, urban professional in the agronomy sector called his own perspective “technical” while labeling the converse “idealistic.” Ramon, the agronomist who articulated these labels wrote a series of op-eds denouncing the 2014 Monsanto Law in the country's most widely circulated paper. Ramon told the story of how his article was written in response to another article published prior. Describing the other article, he said “the person who wrote it is...well is a person more of the socialist, leftists bent. The other article was written very passionately, and in my opinion, without much scientific evidence.” He went on to explain that the controversy over this passionate, unscientific article spurred himself and others like him, to weigh in. When asked to expound on this distinction between the two perspectives he responded, “Her article was idealistic, this is technical. I’m attacking the problems, the problems that the law could cause without being at all idealistic about it. What I’m doing is saying look, if they want to pass this law-- that’s fine but look at the law itself. There are technical problems with the law. I’m not attacking the law itself but the contents of the law. This is the point I’m trying to make.”

The main problem raised in his articles is that Guatemala does not have a national inventory or system of cataloging the country's numerous species of plants, animals, and agricultural products. He locates this concern within a history of biopiracy in Guatemala, naming varieties of avocado and chayote he claims are Guatemalan but have been patented in Mexico. Without some system of control, he explained “this law would open up the option that they could patent everything they liked without any control”, explaining that problems of “traceability” could allow any number of seeds originating in Guatemala to be appropriated and patented in other countries. Thus, he identifies his “technical” critique as one directed at specific aspects of the law, in contrast to an “idealistic” perspective that rejects GMOs writ large and the political system that produced the law.

I attended a public forum in 2018, convened after a new regulation (RT 65.06.01:18) was proposed—which evolved into the legislation now in effect. A representative of the country's professional association for agronomists was invited to give a presentation. The agronomist gave a twenty-minute presentation focussed on the economic consequences of moving forward with the law as written. He talked extensively about Guatemala's biodiversity and the potential to use genetic diversity to benefit Guatemala's economy. Instead, he explained, “there are no benefits for us because there aren't any Guatemalan seed companies.” Rather than reject the proposed regulation or develop a new proposal, he concluded the presentation suggesting tweaks be made to the existing regulation. This reformist perspective, commonly recounted by other experts, singles out aspects of GMOs or the proposed legislation as the main problematic needing revision. Specifically, these experts emphasize the need to protect Guatemala's status as a mega-diverse country, lament the country's inability to do so adequately, and fear the national economic consequences of passing a law to allow GMOs without other biosafety protocols in place.

This perspective was also exemplified by the National Council of Protected Areas (CONAP), one government agency that took a stance against the Monsanto Law and has been actively engaged in crafting an alternative legislative framework. The central problem with GMOs, recounted by representatives of CONAP, are the potential threats to the country's biodiversity because of the lack of accompanying biosafety regulations in Guatemala. A senior official at the agency, and other employees I spoke with, also demonstrated a concern for fair access and use of biodiversity, as well as the inclusion of Indigenous communities' participation in this ongoing conversation. However, there seemed to be a point at which these actors are less tolerant of alternative views about GMOs. A higher-up at CONAP explained,

We've encountered some dogmatic points of view. Some groups say ‘we don't want any transgenic organisms’.... The problem with this is related to health. We need some GMOs, for example, to produce penicillin, you can't prohibit that. What worries me there is that there's a lack of education by the population. People are in opposition, but we believe that the opposition can't be so radical, rather some things have to be permitted and others no. For example, our position is that...speaking of crops, for

crops that Guatemala is the centre of origin, they (GMOs) shouldn't be permitted for the possible contamination or effect that they could have on local species.

Rather than limit the types of GM crops allowed, an alternative suggested by many experts is to restrict GMOs from certain regions of the country with a higher presence of native seed varieties. This solution resembles Mexico's approach to GMO regulation, which many of these experts spoke of favorably. In siding with this reformist approach to GMO regulation, this CONAP representative also disparages those who oppose GMOs outright, as "radical" and uninformed, emulating the "idealistic" label offered by the agronomist.

This perspective prioritizes concern for biosafety but importantly it also shifts the conversation away from another set of concerns about property rights and unequal relations of power. While heterogeneous movements have opened the GMO debate to a wider range of voices, the space within which this conversation takes place may be defined by those actors with more power and influence—like these experts. Consequently, debates become concentrated on the appropriate governance of biotechnology in ways that can be controlled without major changes to existing social structures and institutions (Andrée, 2011; Newell, 2008). This coheres with what Levidow (1998) refers to as the "biotechnologizing of democracy"—the focussing of debates on technical problems, which are "amendable to neo-liberal risk-benefit analysis" and demand a "privileged role for experts" (p. 220).

In Guatemala, experts who allied with anti-GMO social movements in 2014, biotechnologized by objecting to specific components of the law or specific aspects of GMOs, emphasizing the need for a "scientific" or logical understanding of how genetic contamination works, potential threats to biodiversity, and economic rationality. These "technical" forms of opposition represent the ways experts aligned themselves with the rule of law, science, and common sense. These discourses did not foreground critiques of neoliberalism, capitalism, the enclosure of the commons, or ideas of equity and justice. Importantly, these discourses were also often employed to distance themselves from those who did, those who were perceived to be more radical.

Democratizing biotechnology

In contrast to this technocratic perspective focussed on biodiversity and nuanced ways to legislate its protection, Indigenous and *campesinos* peoples reject the privatization of seeds and resist any legislative attempts other than a total ban on GMOs. The idea that Monsanto, or corporations like it, would be empowered to "sell our own seeds back to us" was reiterated repeatedly. This was directly linked to the idea that a *campesino* could also be made to pay a fine if they were found using a patented seed they did not purchase. This idea was explained as antithetical to Indigenous and *campesino* lifeways in Guatemala. When I asked Carolina, an

Indigenous activist with REDSAG, to explain what motivated her to protest the Monsanto Law in 2014, she replied:

The part about intellectual property, the privatization of seeds. This...this is, something that will not happen in Guatemala. Because here seeds are all going to be exchanged, so when somebody tells you, hey you are going to be penalized for doing this (exchanging seeds), or you're not going to have the right over, or to sow your own seeds—but how? If they were left to me by my grandparents and my great-grandparents?... So, people are not going to ever understand, how it could be possible that someone shows up, that maybe isn't even Guatemalan, is a foreigner, and claims for themselves what I have struggled for?

Many people expressed various forms of this idea—that seeds, the inheritance of Indigenous communities and *campesinos*, would be appropriated and used against this same group of people to criminalize them.

To be clear, people of all walks of life found this aspect of the Monsanto Law particularly objectionable. Yet, this was uniquely personal and infuriating to Indigenous and *campesino* informants, because it was understood within a larger historical trajectory of dispossession and criminalization. Carolina continued,

My family was, well...victim of the armed conflict. I took refuge in Mexico for fourteen years when I was a young girl. I lost a lot of family in the armed conflict. I think this leaves you with a reflection, with a perspective of what happens in this county- and you say, these were my brother and sisters...so so many. There is...in Guatemala, there is enormous dispossession, and above all of Indigenous peoples.... Today there aren't favorable resolutions, because they don't want to cede control over land. So, when you see all of this, you realize that you are a part of all of this. For us, Indigenous peoples, we are...we don't look at the natural world, at the land from outside, we see it from the inside because we are part of it.

Carolina's perspective demonstrates how recent threats to native maize are inseparable from a larger historical arc of colonial dispossession and her perception of human/non-human relations. During a meeting convoked by CONAP, a man representing an Indigenous civil society organization reiterated this ontological argument. In resistance to the continued use of the word biodiversity by CONAP, he chimed in "Todo es vida" (everything is alive), he said, "we have to break this mindset", referring to the dichotomy often drawn between human life and "nature". He argued it would be impossible to create an adequate biosafety regulation—one that would protect life from this more holistic perspective. This perspective, based in broader social-economic concerns and historical abuses of power exemplifies what others framed as "radical" or "idealistic," rather than "technical" opposition to GMOs.

The critique of their perspective does not go unnoticed by Indigenous and *campesino* activists. In fact, they had their own critiques of biotechnologizing to offer. Carolina told me the story of an organization, active in the REDSAG network, which promotes hybrid seeds (a cross-pollinated seed) like they are “some kind of marvel and that hybrids are going to save the world.” Incredulously, she told me their naiveté can be explained by the fact that they’re “academics” who have no concept for the day-to-day life of a *campesino*. Another *campesino* I spoke with added, “how many scientists are they going to invite to explain what transgenic seeds are? It makes me laugh, because...its fine technical information...it’s all fascinating. But it’s not the most important thing, this is not the point. The most important aspects are social, political and economic.”

Similar to other places in Latin America, Indigenous and *campesino* seed activists see their work as a continuation of a long history of struggle against imperialism and (neo) colonialism (Escobar & Fitting, 2016). Their resistance draws on a rights-based framework, clearly aligning with “seed sovereignty,” rejecting GMO, IPRs, and any form of seed commodification writ large. The activists I spoke with pursue seed sovereignty because they see defending native seeds not only as a form of resistance to corporate agriculture and the commodification of life but as part of a larger struggle for political autonomy, cultural survival, and food sovereignty. They resisted the terms of the debate proposed by “expert” allies and used the GMO issue to challenge prevalent forms of both “technology” and “democracy”—what Levidow (1998) calls “democratizing biotechnology”.

Political strategies

Important differences also showed up in the political strategies of these diverse actors. Experts demonstrated hesitance to participate in street protests and some disparagement for those who do. A middle-aged *Ladina* biologist, Mary, from Guatemala City, described apprehension to participate in street protests. Mary, who was active on a university committee that studied and ultimately denounced the Monsanto Law, explained of her own opposition, “First of all, I don't consider myself an activist. Yes, I reacted (to the Monsanto Law), but this is my job, this is my normal work, I revise documents, look for justifications, the technical aspects, the legal aspects and then confront them. But, I didn't go with social organizations and protest in front of congress...those kinds of things, no. That's not my job.... I don't consider myself an activist.” Central to her refusal of the label “activist” is a critical view of protests, and a dismissiveness toward *campesino* mobilizations. This was a perspective I also heard from others, even those who had very active roles in denouncing the law. Ramon, the individual who wrote op-eds, also demonstrated disdain for street protests, questioning the authenticity of protestors. He explained, “The *campesino* goes out (to protest) because they give him food and they give him money”, urging me to verify this fact with others. He described this kind of “manipulation” as threatening the potential for the movement to have an “internal conscience” necessary to make long term change.

Both perspectives signal class and ethnic boundaries, creating a dichotomy between those who draw on their emotions to resist GMOs and those who make intellectual decisions about them—those who are misguided and those who have made a calculated, informed decision. This dichotomy resembles what Wynne (2001) calls “expert cultures of risk”. Experts, he explains, create a false dichotomy “between factual, objective and real knowledge on the one hand, and cognitively empty emotion or values on the other, and that whilst science looks after the former, lay publics are only capable of taking sentimental, emotional and intellectually vacuous positions” (p. 445). While these “emotional” reactions in some instances may be effectual, they are often perceived to be substantively empty. Rather than just being emotional reactions, Wynne argues, public judgments about GMOs are often quite rational. They are often judgments about the nature of knowledge itself, the ways costs and benefits are calculated and the quality of scientific and political institutions that produce and endorse them. Thus, labeling some forms of contention as emotional or reactionary becomes a way in which these opinions can be reduced, not taken seriously, and ultimately overlooked.

These statements about the “best” way to oppose GMOs align well with “technical” discourse, which participants drew on to align their anti-GM positions with science and the law. In doing so they also distance themselves from those who are more “idealistic” or in this case, “activists.” Together these discourses delegitimize more radical claims, delimit the boundaries of debate, and frame GMOs as amenable to a technocratic solution. In other words, they frame the problems of GMOs as challenges that can be managed within existing structures of bureaucratic and political power (Newell, 2009). Framing the problems of GMOs as such may have ultimately led to the kinds of biosafety and procedural details elaborated in the 2019 legislation. These restrictions—though loosely worded and arguably toothless, seem to address concerns articulated by “expert” anti-GMO actors in Guatemala. As has been demonstrated elsewhere (Carroll, 2016; Dondanville & Dougherty, 2019), these concessions may be the first step in facilitating a path for largely unchecked capital accumulation.

Conclusion

As several scholars have noted, political contestations about agrarian and food justice issues are far from homogenous (Borras Jr. et al., 2018; Holt-Giménez & Shattuck, 2011). They are often marked by both conflict and cooperation, convergence and contradiction (Borras Jr. et al., 2018). Actors can diverge in their emphasis on “immediate and long-term issues, strategic and tactical political maneuvers, sectoral and multisectoral issues, policy change and system change, reform or revolution” (Borras Jr. et al., 2018). This diversity is not always a threat. It can be possible for groups to pursue different preferred strategies of protest and use its resources “where the returns are likely to be highest” and to still articulate a common critique (Newell, 2008 p. 358). In the case of Guatemala, however, particularities of the context shaped anti-GMO intra-movement

dynamics and produced tensions that are difficult to surmount—tensions resonant with historically significant class politics.

Experts—mostly urban *Ladinos*—tended to articulate their resistance to GMOs using a “technical” discourse. This meant objecting to specific components of the law or specific aspects of GMOs, emphasizing the need for a “scientific” understanding of how genetic contamination works and potential threats to biodiversity. These concerns fixated on certain pre-conditions, such as designating restrictions in areas of higher genetic diversity. This policy-fix described by experts is underpinned by economic rationality, specifically desires to secure greater national economic benefits. These discourses did not foreground critiques of neoliberalism or capitalism, or ideas of equity and justice. By framing their opinions in scientific and economic terms they also draw boundaries around themselves and those who are perceived to be emotional or idealistic in their tactics, motivations, and goals. These labels function to trivialize broader critiques often wielded by *campesino* and Indigenous activists who, in contrast, describe their perception of GM seeds as threatening to lifeways and their resistance to GMOs in anti-neoliberal and anti-capitalist terms. These actors democratize biotechnology by challenging the terms and conditions of the GMO debate.

For a time, these divergences did not affect the movement’s ability to slow the advance of GMOs, but the future success of this movement is beginning to look dim. The lack of large-scale mass mobilization in the face of new legislation may be, in part, explained by the tensions brought to light in this study. As articulated by experts, some would be satisfied with minimal restrictions on GMOs, the likes of which would not undermine the neoliberal food regime.

This would square well with what science and technology scholars have written about how biotechnologizing can limit the horizons of anti-GMO social movements. Previous research employing this STS concept, has portrayed this framing as a tool of pro-biotech groups, attempting to secure the consent of anti-GMO activists. In contrast, the case of Guatemala shows that some well-intentioned anti-GMO critics can also, perhaps unwittingly, biotechnologize democracy to the same ends. Thus, the case of anti-GMO activism in Guatemala reveals the need for more attention to the heterogenous motivations of social movement actors, the intra-movement dynamics they create, and the ways specific issues produce collaboration and tension in particular contexts.

In attempting to disaggregate actors and their discourse, it may be too easy to assume a coherence that is not as neat in reality. An agronomy professor who printed out a copy of the Monsanto Law bill for me, emphasizing legal technicalities with which he disapproved, also precariously balanced on a chair to locate a cob of native maize off a shelf, which he presented with glowing adoration. While his personal argument against the Monsanto Law was based more on the sheet of paper, this act suggests native maize was also relevant and important to him at some level. Thus, it seems important to consider the ways actors resist any one simple framing or may embody multiple. Attention to these contradictions, as well as greater attention to the way intersectional social identities might combine to shape beliefs and behavior, would enhance further investigation of this topic.

As others have argued about contemporary agri-food movements, effects also matter (Carroll, 2016; Gupta, 2014; Shattuck et al., 2015). Since as early as 2006, transnational corporations and powerful trade partners have pressured the Guatemalan state to align national laws with UPOV. For more than a decade and in the face of several attempts, the country resisted these powerful forces. Defying these neoliberal foes is no small feat for Guatemala, especially given its post-conflict state. This raises the question: how important is ideological cohesion for challenging the neoliberal food regime? In the case of Guatemala, untangling the balance of forces in the anti-GMO movement has shown important ideological differences and significant impediments to building a truly anti-neoliberal bloc. Despite the differences in logic and ideological tensions, I also saw powerful representation of collaboration across divides. As the man from the professional agronomist association delivered his ardently reformist, technocratic critique of the proposed GMO legislation, he stood under a banner with the words written in all caps “IN DEFENSE OF OUR NATIVE SEEDS AND ANCESTRAL KNOWLEDGE. NO TO TRANSGENICS AND TO PATENTS.” Despite important ideological differences in the room, this man was invited to speak and felt comfortable enough to share his opinion openly. However weak or imperfect these alliances may be, these spaces for dialogue may at least hold the door ajar for stronger alliances to be built and ideas to spread and grow.

References

- Acuerdo Ministerial No. 271. (2019). Ministerio de Agricultura, Ganadería y Alimentación. <https://visar.maga.gob.gt/visar/2019/20/AM271-2019.pdf>
- Andrée, P. (2011). Civil society and the political economy of GMO failures in Canada: A Neo-Gramscian analysis. *Environmental Politics*, 20(2), 173–91. DOI: 10.1080/03066150.2015.1041519
- Baletti, B., Johnson, T. M., & Wolford, W. (2008). ‘Late mobilization’: Transnational peasant networks and grassroots organizing in Brazil and South Africa. *Journal of Agrarian Change*, 8(2–3), 290–314. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1471-0366.2008.00171.x>
- Bolaños, R. M. (2019, October 23). *Nueva normativa permite producción de cultivos transgénicos en el país para consumo y venta*. La Prensa Libre. <https://www.prensalibre.com/economia/nueva-normativa-permite-produccion-de-cultivos-con-semillas-transgenicas-para-consumo-en-el-pais/>
- Bolaños, R. M. (2020, January 27). *Surge controversia por regulaciones que permiten cultivo de transgénicos para consumo humano*. La Prensa Libre. <https://www.prensalibre.com/economia/surge-controversia-por-regulaciones-que-permiten-cultivos-de-transgenicos-para-consumo-humano/>
- Borras Jr., S. M. (2010). The politics of transnational agrarian movements. *Development and Change*, 41(5), 771–803. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-7660.2010.01661.x>
- Borras Jr, S. M., Moreda, T., Alonso-Fradejas, A., & Brent, Z. W. (2018). Converging social

- justice issues and movements: Implications for political actions and research. *Third World Quarterly*, 39(7), 1227–1246. DOI: 10.1080/01436597.2018.1491301
- Carroll, M. (2016). The new agrarian double movement: hegemony and resistance in the GMO food economy. *Review of International Political Economy*, 23(1), 1-28.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/09692290.2015.1095781>
- Copeland, N. (2019). *The democracy development machine: Neoliberalism, radical pessimism, and authoritarian populism in Mayan Guatemala*. Cornell University Press.
- Copeland, N. (2014). Mayan imaginaries of democracy: Interactive sovereignties and political affect in postrevolutionary Guatemala. *American Ethnologist*, 41(2), 305–319. DOI 10.1111/amet.12077
- Dondanville, T. W., & Dougherty, M. L. (2019). Porousness and Peru's moratorium on genetically modified organisms: stakeholder epistemologies and neoliberal science. *Environmental Sociology*, 6(1), 1–13. <https://doi.org/10.1080/23251042.2019.1690726>
- Edelman, M. (2005). Bringing the moral economy back in to the study of 21st-century transnational peasant movements. *American Anthropologist*, 107(3), 331–345.
<http://doi.wiley.com/10.1525/aa.2005.107.3.331>
- Edelman, M. (2014). Food Sovereignty: forgotten genealogies and future regulatory challenges. *Journal of Peasant Studies*, 41(6):959-978.
- Escobar, L. G., & Fitting, E. (2016). The red de semillas libres: Contesting biohegemony in Colombia. *Journal of Agrarian Change*, 16(4), 711–719. DOI 10.1111/joac.12161
- Expediente 6767-2019. (2019). Corte de Constitucionalidad, Republica de Guatemala, C.A.
<http://138.94.255.164/Sentencias/846825.6767-2019.pdf>
- Felicien, A., Schiavoni, C.M., Saturno S., Omaña, E., Requena, A., & Camacaro, W. (2018). Exploring the 'grey areas' of state-society interaction in food sovereignty construction: the battle for Venezuela's seed law. *The Journal of Peasant Studies*, DOI: 10.1080/03066150.2018.1525363
- Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO). (2014). *Country fact sheet on food and agriculture policy trends*. <http://www.fao.org/3/a-i4124e.pdf>
- Fitting, E. (2010). *The struggle for maize: Campesinos, workers, and transgenic corn in the Mexican countryside*. Duke University Press.
- Fitting, E. (2014). Culture of corn and anti-GMO activism in Mexico and Colombia. In C. Counihan & V. Siniscalchi (Eds.), *Food activism: Agency, democracy and economy*. Bloomsbury.
- Friedmann, H., & McMichael, P. (1989). Agriculture and the state system: The rise and decline of national agricultures, 1870 to the present. *Sociologia Ruralis*, 29(2), 93–117.
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9523.1989.tb00360.x>
- Grandia, L. (2014). Modified landscapes: Vulnerabilities to genetically modified corn in northern Guatemala. *The Journal of Peasant Studies*, 41(1), 79–105. DOI 10.1080/03066150.2013.872631

- Grandia, L. (2017). Sacred maize against a legal maze: The diversity of resistance to Guatemala's "Monsanto Law." *Journal for the Study of Religion, Nature and Culture*, 111(1), 56–85. <https://doi.org/10.1558/jsrnc.30666>
- Gupta, C. (2014). Return to freedom: Anti-GMO aloha 'Āina activism on Molokai as an expression of place-based food sovereignty. *Globalizations*, 12(4), 1-16. DOI 10.1080/14747731.2014.957586
- Hale, C. (2005). Neoliberal multiculturalism: The remaking of cultural rights and racial dominance in Central America. *Political and Legal Anthropology Review*, 28(1), 10–28. DOI 10.1525/pol.2005.28.1.10
- Hale, C. R. (2002). Does multiculturalism menace? Governance, cultural rights and the politics of identity in Guatemala. *Journal of Latin American Studies*, 34(3), 485–524. DOI 10.1017/S0022216X02006521
- Handy, J. (1984). *Gift of the Devil: A History of Guatemala*. South End Press.
- Harvey, D. (2003). *The New Imperialism*. Oxford University Press.
- Harvey, D. (2005). *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*. Oxford University Press.
- Holt-Giménez, E., & Shattuck, A. (2011). Food crises, food regimes and food movements: rumblings of reform or tides of transformation? *The Journal of Peasant Studies*, 38(1), 109–144. DOI
- Isakson, S.R. (2009). No hay ganancia en la milpa: the agrarian question, food sovereignty, and the on-farm conservation of agrobiodiversity in the Guatemalan highlands, *The Journal of Peasant Studies*, 36(4), 725-759, DOI: 10.1080/03066150903353876
- Isakson, S. R. (2014). Maize diversity and the political economy of agrarian restructuring in Guatemala. *Journal of Agrarian Change*, 14(3), 347–379. DOI 10.1111/joac.12023
- Kinchy, A. J. (2012). *Seeds, science, and struggle: The global politics of transgenic crops*. MIT Press.
- Kinchy, A. J., Kleinman, D. L., & Autry, R. (2008). Against free markets, against science? Regulating the socio-economic effects of biotechnology. *Rural Sociology*, 73(2), 147–179. DOI 10.1526/003601108784514570
- Klepek, J. (2011). The new men of maize. In G. Grandin, D. T. Levenson, & E. Oglesby (Eds.), *The Guatemalan reader: History, culture, politics* (pp 56-575.). Duke University Press.
- Klepek, J. (2012). Against the grain: knowledge alliances and resistance to agricultural biotechnology in Guatemala. *Canadian Journal of Development Studies*, 33(3), 310–325. DOI 10.1080/02255189.2012.719824
- Kloppenborg, J. (2010). Impeding dispossession, enabling repossession: Biological open source and the recovery of seed sovereignty. *Journal of Agrarian Change*, 10(3), 367–388. DOI 10.1111/j.1471-0366.2010.00275.x
- Kloppenborg, J. (2014). Re-purposing the master's tools: the open source seed initiative and the struggle for seed sovereignty. *The Journal of Peasant Studies*, 41(6), 1225–1246. DOI 10.1080/03066150.2013.875897

- Lapegna, P. (2014). Global ethnography and genetically modified crops in Argentina: On adoptions, resistances, and adaptations. *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*, 43(2), 202–227.
- Levidow, L., & Carr, S. (1997). How biotechnology regulation sets a risk/ethics boundary. *Agriculture and Human Values*, 14(1), 29–43. DOI 10.1023/A:1007394812312
- Levidow, L. (1998). Democratizing technology—or technologizing democracy? Regulating agricultural biotechnology in Europe. *Technology in Society* 20(2), 211–226.
- Levien, M. (2007). India's double-movement: Polanyi and the National Alliance of People's Movements. *Berkeley Journal of Sociology* 51, 119–149.
<http://www.jstor.org/stable/41035623>
- Moore, K., Kleinman, D. L., Hess, D., & Frickel, S. (2011). Science and neoliberal globalization: a political sociological approach. *Theory & Society*, 40, 505–532.
<https://www.jstor.org/stable/41475706>
- Motta, R. (2014). Social Disputes over GMOs: An Overview. *Sociology Compass* 8(12), 1360–1376. DOI 10.1111/soc4.12229
- Müller, B. (2006). Introduction: GMOs-global objects of contention. *Focaal—European Journal of Anthropology*, 48, 3–16.
- Müller, B. (2020). Flux, unrelenting—the struggle for local seed sovereignty in Nicaragua. *The Journal of Peasant Studies*, 47(4), 720–740. DOI 10.1080/03066150.2020.1738395
- Newell, P. (2009). Bio-hegemony: The political economy of agricultural biotechnology. *Journal of Latin American Studies*, 41, 27–57. DOI 10.1017/S0022216X08005105
- Newell, P. (2008). Trade and biotechnology in Latin America: Democratization, contestation and the politics of mobilization. *Journal of Agrarian Change*, 8(2–3), 345–376.
<https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1471-0366.2008.00173.x>
- Otero, G. & Lapegna, P. (2016). Transgenic Crops in Latin America: Expropriation, Negative Value and the State. *Journal of Agrarian Change* 16(4), 665–674.
- Pechlaner, G. & Otero, G. (2010). The Neoliberal Food Regime: Neoregulation and the New Division of Labor in North America. *Rural Sociology* 75(2), 179–208.
- Peschard, K., & Randeria, S. (2020). ‘Keeping seeds in our hands’: the rise of seed activism. *The Journal of Peasant Studies*, 47(4), 613–647. DOI 10.1080/03066150.2020.1753705
- Polanyi, K. (1944). *The Great Transformation: The Political and Economic Origins of Our Time*. Beacon Press.
- Quist, D., & Chapela, I. H. (2001). Transgenic DNA introgressed into traditional maize landraces in Oaxaca, Mexico. *Nature*, 414(6863), 541–543. <https://doi.org/10.1038/35107068>
- Reglamento Técnico 65.06.01:18 (2018). Reglamento Técnico de Bioseguridad de Organismos Vivos Modificados Para Uso Agropecuario.
<https://visar.maga.gob.gt/visar/2019/20/RTOVM.pdf>
- Scoones, I. (2008). Mobilizing against GM crops in India, South Africa and Brazil. *Journal of*

- Agrarian Change*, 8(2–3), 315–344. DOI 10.1111/j.1471-0366.2008.00172.x
- Scott, J. C. (1976). *The moral economy of the peasant: Rebellion and subsistence in southeast Asia*. Yale University Press.
- Shattuck, A., Schiavoni, C. M., & Vangelder, Z. (2015). Translating the politics of food sovereignty: Digging into contradictions, uncovering new dimensions. *Globalizations*, 12(4), 421–433. DOI 10.1080/14747731.2015.1041243
- Soleri, D., Cleveland, D. A., Aragón, F., Fuentes, M. R., Ríos, H., & Sweeney, S. H. (2005). Understanding the potential impact of transgenic crops in traditional agriculture: maize farmers' perspectives in Cuba, Guatemala and Mexico. *Environ. Biosafety Res.*, 4(3), 141-66. <https://doi.org/10.1051/ebr:2005019>
- Thompson, E.P. (1963). *The Making of the English Working Class*. Random House.
- United Nations Environmental Programme (UNEP). (N.d.). *Why does biosafety matter?* <https://www.unep.org/explore-topics/biosafety/why-does-biosafety-matter>
- Wainwright, J., & Mercer, K. (2008). The dilemma of decontamination: A Gramscian analysis of the Mexican transgenic maize dispute. *Geoforum*, 40(3), 345–354. DOI 10.1016/j.geoforum.2008.09.013
- Warman, A., & Westrate, N. L. (2003). *Corn and capitalism: How a botanical bastard grew to global dominance*. DIANE Publishing Company.
- Williams, L. D. A., & Moore, S. (2019). Conceptualizing justice and counter-expertise. *Science as Culture*, 28(3), 251-276. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09505431.2019.1632820>
- Wittman, H. (2009) Reworking the metabolic rift: La Via Campesina, agrarian citizenship, and food sovereignty. *The Journal of Peasant Studies*, 36(4), 805-826. DOI 10.1080/03066150903353991
- Wolford, W. (2005). Agrarian moral economies and neoliberalism in Brazil: competing worldviews and the state in the struggle for land. *Environment and Planning A: Economy and Space*, 37(2), 241–261. <https://doi.org/10.1068%2Fa3745>
- World Food Program. (2017). *Food security and emigration: Why people flee and the impact on family members left behind in El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras*. https://docs.wfp.org/api/documents/WFP-0000022124/download/?_ga=2.44513316.1092963703.1505931262-598472494.1505931262
- Wynne, B. (2001). Creating public alienation: Expert cultures of risk and ethics on GMOs. *Science as Culture*, 10(4), 445–481. DOI 10.1080/09505430120093586
- Yapa, L. (1993). What are improved seeds? An epistemology of the Green Revolution. *Economic Geography*, 69(3), 254–273. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/143450>



Original Research Article

Sharing the struggle for fairness: Exploring possibilities for solidarity & just labour in organic agriculture

Susanna Klassen*, Fuerza Migrante and Hannah Wittman

University of British Columbia

Abstract

Despite the organic movement's early connections to labour advocacy and commitment to the principle of "fairness," the evolution of the organic sector has generated questions about the strength of its links to food justice in certified organic farming. Scholar-activists have, in particular, highlighted the problematic nature of labour relations on many organic farms. This article reports on a growing relationship between an organic farming association (Organic BC) and a migrant workers justice collective (Fuerza Migrante) with aspirations of alliance building. We examine the extent to which efforts by the organic community towards fairness in labour relations may signal an opening for the organic movement to take up the more radical struggle for rights, status, and justice for racialized migrant workers. We draw on theoretical work on post-capitalist relations and emancipatory social transformations to illuminate the importance of complementary efforts. While the primary demands raised by migrant workers and their allies (e.g., structural changes to temporary foreign worker programs) are not yet mirrored by the organic community's advocacy, we see preliminary efforts towards centering of migrant worker struggles for justice that may open up spaces for social emancipation for workers in organic farming systems. We conclude with recommendations for how the organic community in Canada could act in solidarity with migrants and advance migrant justice priorities.

En sus inicios, el movimiento orgánico estaba fuertemente vinculado con la defensa de los derechos de los trabajadores y comprometido con el principio de "justicia". Con el paso del tiempo, la evolución del sector orgánico ha generado cuestionamientos sobre la fuerza de estos

*Corresponding author: susannae.klassen@gmail.com

DOI: 10.15353/cfs-rcea.v9i2.536

ISSN: 2292-3071

vínculos y su relación con la justicia alimentaria en la agricultura orgánica certificada. Académicos-activistas, en particular, han destacado la intrínseca problemática de muchas granjas orgánicas. El presente artículo reporta la creciente relación y aspiración de construir alianzas entre una asociación de agricultura orgánica (Organic BC) y un colectivo de justicia para trabajadores migrantes (Fuerza Migrante). Examinamos hasta qué punto los esfuerzos por parte de la comunidad orgánica hacia la justicia en relaciones laborales puede representar una oportunidad para el movimiento orgánico de asumir una postura más radical por los derechos, estatus y la justicia de los trabajadores migrantes racializados. El análisis se basa en el trabajo teórico sobre relaciones post-capitalistas y las transformaciones sociales emancipatorias que iluminan la importancia de los esfuerzos complementarios. Si bien las principales demandas planteadas por los trabajadores migrantes y sus aliados (por ejemplo, cambios estructurales en los programas de trabajadores extranjeros temporales) aún no se reflejan en la lucha de la comunidad orgánica, vemos esfuerzos preliminares enfocados en la lucha de los trabajadores migrantes por la justicia, los cuales pueden abrir espacios para la emancipación social en sistemas de agricultura orgánica. Concluimos con recomendaciones sobre cómo la comunidad orgánica en Canadá podría actuar en solidaridad con los migrantes y promover prioridades de justicia para migrantes.

Keywords: Fairness; food justice; labour; migrant justice; organic agriculture; organic certification; organic standards; participatory action research; social justice; social transformation

Figure 1: Painting by members of Fuerza Migrante in collaboration with BC Migrante and Company Erasga, created in 2018



Introduction

The contemporary organic sector¹ stems from diverse foundations, from the agricultural communities of India where Sir Albert Howard developed the so-called “Indore method,” to the environmental movement spurred by Rachel Carson’s *Silent Spring*.² Though perhaps a lesser-known link, the organic movement was also bolstered by hundreds of thousands of Mexican migrant farm workers in the late 1960s, around the same time that the organic food movement was starting to gain traction among both farmers and consumers in the U.S. The United Farm Workers (UFW) protested hazardous working conditions caused by unsafe application of toxic pesticides, and under the leadership of Cesar Chavez, Dolores Huerta, and others, and in collaboration with allies like the Black Panther Party, succeeded in mobilizing millions of consumers to boycott the grapes and lettuce they were working to produce (Araiza, 2009; Garcia, 2013). The coalitions they formed were a radical act of labor and racial solidarity (Minkoff-Zern, 2014), and the resulting boycott bridged the linked struggles for farmworker justice and the interests of health and social justice-minded consumers—a boon for the organic market (Obach, 2015; Sligh & Cierpka, 2007). They also succeeded in bargaining with producers for the first-ever farm labour contract in the history of California (Garcia, 2013).

Despite this early connection to the labour movement and other social movements of the 1970s, scholars, activists, and the public question the current extent of the organic sector’s commitment to social justice in certified organic farming. Legal organic standards do not usually govern social aspects of production, such as working conditions (Klassen et al., 2022; Seufert et al., 2017). Many alternative food movement spaces occupied by the organic sector (e.g., farmers’ markets) recreate and perpetuate hierarchies of power and privilege (Alkon, 2008) and invisibilize the work of food and farm workers, many of whom are racialized migrants (Alkon, 2013; Sachs et al., 2014). Combined with consumer fears about pesticides and ideals about ethical and “good” foods, the economic barriers of higher-cost organic produce can also reinforce diet- and nutrition-related inequities (Cairns et al., 2013; Huang et al., 2016).

While the contemporary dominant notions of “organic” may have strayed from its social justice foundations, some argue that those foundations may never have been stable to begin with. Organic farming is not entirely independent from the agrarian colonial project, which was used as a tool for dispossession and displacement of First Nations when the first white settlers arrived in North America (Carter, 2019; Daschuk, 2013). Many practices that are foundational to organic

¹ We use the term “organic community” to refer to the collective of individuals who advance the work of the organic movement, and who are active in the discussions and activities that define it. We use the term “organic sector” to refer to the larger assemblage of official processes and institutions, including the market-oriented dimensions of organic agri-food production, which are animated by the organic community. While the organic community also includes eaters, processors, and others who play a crucial role in the evolution of the organic sector through their participation in organic supply chains, the focus of this paper is on those who participate in or work on organic food *production*, specifically.

² Other scholars have detailed the diverse origins of the organic sector globally. For an exploration of this important history, see Heckman, 2006 and Lockeretz, 2007.

and regenerative farming (e.g., polycultures and agroforestry) are built on Indigenous knowledge and cultivation methods, often without acknowledgement, contributing to the white-washing of sustainable agriculture (Heim, 2020). Through temporary foreign worker programs, agriculture in much of the global North depends on the labour of migrants, including Indigenous peoples of Mexico, who seek work in the U.S. and Canada due to the impacts of liberalized trade and structural adjustment on their home communities (Holt-Giménez et al., 2010; Rosset, 2006). Others have argued that the individualist “back to the land” movement (to which many organic farmers subscribe) is white supremacist and European settler-centric at its core (Calo, 2020; Philpott, 2020).

While acknowledging these injustices, this paper focusses primarily on openings for possible just futures. This research was sparked by the incipient development of relationships between members of an organic farming association, Organic BC (formerly the Certified Organic Associations of BC or “COABC”), a migrant rights collective (Fuerza Migrante) and university researchers with the possibility of becoming a “progressive-radical alliance” (Holt-Giménez & Shattuck, 2011). Here, we seek to explore the ways in which actors in the organic sector are working towards more fair and just labour in organic agriculture. We draw from data collected through qualitative interviews, participant observation, and document analysis, and several years of participatory research and engagement by Fuerza Migrante, Organic BC, and university researchers relating to labour and migrant workers in the organic sector.

We examine how approaches to addressing labour-related injustice taken by the organic community and those fighting for migrant justice challenge and/or complicate one another (Rosol et al., this issue). In particular, we ask whether the “progressive” organic community’s recent work related to labour issues signals an opening towards the more “radical” struggles for rights and status advanced by the migrant justice movement (Holt-Giménez & Shattuck, 2011). We draw on theoretical work on emancipatory social science and transformations (Wright, 2010) and post-capitalist relations (Gibson-Graham, 2006) to help us assess the potential of these efforts to support transformational change. Both of these bodies of theoretical and conceptual work illuminate a “politics of economic possibility” (where we want to go) as well as different strategies for transformation of social institutions (how to get there).

We begin by considering the relationship between the organic sector, “social fairness,”³ and labour, focussing on migrant labour in the Canadian context. We then provide an overview of our theoretical groundings and a description of the methodology used for this article. In our findings section, we discuss efforts by a subset of the organic community in BC and in Canada to better share the struggle for fairness with farm workers, and assess how these efforts align with the demands and struggles of migrant workers. We then discuss possible transformative openings for the organic community to work towards solidarity. We conclude with lessons for more just

³ For the purposes of this paper, we use “social fairness” to refer to relationships among and between human beings, with a focus on, but not limited to, the relationships between farm operators/employers and farm workers. The principle of fairness as defined by IFOAM refers more broadly to relationships with other living beings, including plants and animals.

food movement futures and the ways that complementarity between movements can give rise to them.

Background: Organics, justice & agricultural labour in Canada

Just organics?

We conceptualize the “organic community” as part of a broader social movement linked to the organic agri-food sector, operating both within and adjacent to organic institutions, including legal standards frameworks and research centres. Many actors in the organic community align themselves with the principles articulated by the International Federation of Organic Agriculture Movements (IFOAM): Ecology, Health, Fairness and Care. Yet, for many food system actors today, the word “organic” evokes a different narrative. Over the course of several decades, the global organic movement has achieved major milestones with the creation of national organic standards and regulations.⁴ These legal and regulatory developments have ushered in a wave of interest from new actors, including governments and larger corporate agri-food firms, who in turn have wielded their influence on the sector. A growing body of research and scholarship has examined these changes of rapid growth, market mainstreaming, and corporate cooptation, and has called into question the adherence of the contemporary organic sector to its principled roots (Buck et al., 1997; Guthman, 2004, 2014; Jaffee & Howard, 2010). Many of these scholars have concluded that the capitalist context in which organic agriculture operates, including its dependence on extractive processes and low wages, has limited it from achieving its radical potential (Allen & Kovach, 2000; Friedmann, 2005).

As the organic sector has evolved to include larger farms with higher labour demands, and markets have expanded to include international trade, the fairness principle has been the subject of increased discussion and debate (Kröger & Schäfer, 2014; Sligh & Cierpka, 2007). To address gaps in organic standards with respect to fairness, IFOAM first included a section on social fairness in the 1996 standards, which now include requirements and recommendations for working conditions, local community impacts, and Indigenous land rights (IFOAM-Organics International, 2019). While the IFOAM standards represent concrete commitments to social justice that go beyond a statement of principle, the IFOAM standards—unlike national standards in countries with organic laws and regulation—are *voluntary*. As such, it is unclear how these

⁴ In Canada, voluntary national standards were released in 1999, and federal organic regulation to accompany the standards was put into place in 2009. In the United States, the Organic Foods Production Act was passed in 1990, and the final rule that established the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) National Organic Program were released in 1999. Globally, sixty-eight countries currently have fully implemented organic regulation, and twenty countries endorse regional voluntary standards (Willer et al., 2020).

ideological commitments translate to concrete practice in organic production in different jurisdictions.

There are strong theoretical arguments for why diverse, organic and agroecological farms may create the conditions for more just labour (Carlisle et al., 2019; Timmermann & Félix, 2015). While some research has posited social benefits of organic agriculture due to increased labour demands that can provide rural employment (Reganold & Wachter, 2016), this presumed positive outcome rests on the unproven assumption that organic agricultural jobs are “good” jobs. Yet, scholarship and activism focussing on injustice in the food system have highlighted the problematic nature of labour relations on organic farms and the associated struggles for rights, justice and decency for workers (Sbicca, 2015; Weiler et al., 2016b).

While agricultural jobs in general have been shown to be unsafe, poorly paid and with fewer opportunities for advancement, there are few large-scale studies that examine whether organic farms provide better conditions for farm workers (Seufert & Ramankutty, 2017). Emerging research shows that organic farms are not exempt from inequities that farmworkers experience in the broader agriculture sector, including the un[der]paid labour of farm apprentices, the moral economy of self-exploitation by organic farmers, and the use of “unfree” racialized migrant farm workers (Ekers et al., 2016; Galt, 2013; Weiler et al., 2016b). Moreover, unpaid apprenticeships on organic farms (e.g., WWOOFing) may contribute to devaluing farm work more generally, as they provide a source of free labour (albeit less skilled) without engaging in a politics of solidarity with waged and often racialized farmworkers (Gray, 2014; Guthman, 2017).

While both the public and researchers anticipated occupational health gains for labourers on organic farms, the evidence paints a more complicated picture. In what is perhaps the largest quantitative study comparing working conditions on organic and conventional farms, Cross et al. (2008) found no difference in the overall health outcomes of workers, with all workers scoring well below what is considered “normal” in the non-farmworker population. While there is some evidence of decreased pesticide exposure on organic farms (Costa et al., 2014), workers face significant risks to safety and wellbeing in the form of musculoskeletal disorders, traumatic injuries, infectious diseases, and mental health challenges which happen irrespective of pesticide use (Hennebry et al., 2016; Villarejo & Baron, 1999). Moreover, the “naturalness” or non-synthetic nature of an allowable organic input is not necessarily a proxy for non-toxicity.⁵

In a recent project, Soper (2019, 2021) found that workers prefer working on conventional farms due to improved earning potential. When assessing job quality (e.g., wages and employment procedures) across farm size, Harrison and Getz (2015) found that larger organic farms provided better quality jobs than their smaller counterparts, and that job quality benefits were disproportionately afforded to white workers in managerial positions across farms.

⁵ For example, elemental sulphur is an allowable input in organic production in both the U.S. and Canada (CGSB, 2020b; USDA, 2018), but has been documented as one of the leading causes of pesticide poisoning for farmworkers in California (Reeves et al., 2002).

In their exploration of precarious labour used in “alternative” food production, Weiler et al. (2016b) found actors used a moral economy frame based on the ethical foundations of “alternative” food production to rationalize the exploitation of migrants and unpaid interns.

At the same time, organic farms in Canada require more labour: farms with organic products for sale account for 7 percent of all hired employees in agriculture in Canada, even though they only account for 2.9 percent of farms and 2.1 percent of farm area (Statistics Canada, 2016). Data about the use of migrant labour on organic farms is limited, but preliminary analyses of a survey of BC vegetable growers and publicly available data suggest that organic farms utilize migrant farm workers at a rate that is similar to other farms (Klassen et al., 2022). Instances of abuse, neglect and unfair treatment of migrants have been documented on Canadian farms with organic production (Keung, 2010; Woodward, 2019a, 2019b). While organic farms represent a fraction of overall production, the organic sector holds significant potential for making progress towards labour fairness in practice because of its unique social movement legacy, stated values and intentions towards social justice, and disproportionate reliance on hired manual labour.

Unfair and unfree: Migrant agricultural workers in Canada

Since 1966, seasonal agricultural worker programs have facilitated the migration of individuals to perform agricultural work that Canadians or permanent residents are unwilling to do (Government of Canada, 2021).⁶ More than 72,168 positions for Temporary Foreign Workers were granted for primary agriculture in 2019 (Employment and Social Development Canada, 2020a). The majority of these (46,719 positions) were designated under the Seasonal Agricultural Worker Program (SAWP), facilitated by bi-lateral agreements between the national governments of Canada, Mexico, and participating Caribbean countries.

Conditions of employment for agricultural migrant workers in Canada have been characterized by the maxim of the four Ds: dangerous, dirty, difficult, and devalued (Otero & Preibisch, 2010). Migrant workers experience unique structural and socioeconomic vulnerabilities that exacerbate issues that stem from the nature of their work. Individuals who come via the SAWP receive work permits that are tied to one employer, meaning they cannot easily leave poor conditions on one farm to find better conditions elsewhere (Otero & Preibisch, 2015). These “unfree” conditions, combined with the impacts of neoliberal restructuring on working conditions in workers’ home countries, can result in workers accepting or submitting to

⁶ The TFWP includes several “streams” through which workers are brought to Canada to labour in agri-food operations, including the Seasonal Agricultural Workers Program (SAWP) (where workers come for a maximum of eight months at a time to work in primary agriculture), the “Agriculture stream” (where workers come for up to twenty-four months at a time to work in primary agriculture), and the high- and low-wage streams (for work in other sectors, including agri-food but not including primary agricultural commodity production) (Employment and Social Development Canada, 2020b).

conditions that other workers would flee (Binford, 2009; Otero, 2011). Migrant workers face unsafe working conditions, barriers to accessing healthcare, unsanitary housing, and isolation from their families (Caxaj & Cohen, 2019). If a migrant farm worker experiences abuse or a violation of their rights, there are significant barriers for them to access justice due to their precarious status, which is why they are considered to be amongst the most vulnerable workers in Canada (Faraday, 2012; Preibisch & Otero, 2014; United food and comercial workers union [UFCW] Canada, & Agriculture Workers Alliance, 2015).

A growing number of organizations, coalitions, and networks are working towards rights and justice for migrants in Canada. While some have existed for decades (e.g., Justicia for Migrant Workers), others have emerged more recently in response to emerging regional advocacy needs, expanding alliances and networks, as well as junctures stemming from different priorities or ways of working. Most of these organizations provide forms of direct support, including material support, facilitating culturally relevant celebrations, and accessing their rights and services.

Together with other experts and advocates, and in light of exacerbated inequities caused by COVID-19, migrant justice groups have called on the federal and provincial governments for structural changes to the TFWP, including: (1) regularized/resident status for all migrants upon arrival and the end of repatriations; (2) granting of open work permits to migrants; (3) improved protections and benefits; (4) improved procedures to follow-up on complaints from workers; (5) stronger mandates and supports for employers; (6) improved inspection regimes; (7) improved access to information for workers; and, (8) improved representation of migrant organizations in planning and implementation of supports (Barnetson et al., 2020; Haley et al., 2020; Migrant Workers Alliance for Change, 2020; Weiler et al., 2020).

Theoretical grounding: Transforming labour relations, building solidarity

In his influential book *Envisioning Real Utopias*, sociologist Erik Olin Wright lays out the logic and potential of emancipatory social science and pathways of social transformation towards “the elimination of oppression, and the creation of conditions for human flourishing” (2010, p. 10). Wright’s theoretical framing offers several important insights for transforming agricultural institutions towards fair labour relations. The first is a common understanding of “the ways in which existing social institutions and social structures systematically impose harms on people” (Wright, 2010, p. 11), and the role of economic structures of capitalism in doing so. Social justice—the equal access to the necessary material and social means to live flourishing lives—animates critiques of capitalism, as capitalism depends on extracting as much labour effort from workers at as little cost as possible, and incentivizes increasing the vulnerability of workers, making it inherently exploitative. Though not always framed as an explicit critique of capitalism, broader labour movements in agriculture in North America similarly challenge the economic and political structures that create systematic vulnerabilities for workers in the food system (Alkon,

2014). Indeed, the historical development and evolution of agri-food systems globally has been premised on the systemic vulnerabilities of workers (McMichael, 2005; Moore, 2003).

Second, Wright (and other public scholars) advocate for a role for social science beyond diagnosis and critique, towards the task of identifying where we want to go instead, and how to get there. This approach is complementary to J.K. Gibson-Graham's alternative project of "reading the economy for difference rather than dominance", to give the full diversity of alternative economic relations and practices "space to exist" (2006, p. 59). While economic alternatives that re-socialize economic relations are not new to sustainable food movements (e.g., Community Supported Agriculture where eaters have a direct relationship with the farm and share in the risk of farming), viable alternatives that challenge the exploitative nature of capitalism and create progress towards social justice remain elusive, impeded by the confines of what Gibson-Graham call "capitalocentrism" or the inability to conceive of economic relations beyond the dominant capitalist model. In other words, we need to do the work to envision, enact and articulate the various dimensions of alternative futures beyond capitalism for them to be possible.

A third aspect of Wright's theory of social transformation provides language to differentiate between strategies for the transformation of social institutions. Wright's framework highlights important complementarity between different strategies, such as the way that "symbiotic" strategies within the bounds of state-sanctioned institutions complemented by "interstitial" strategies outside of the terrain of the state create incremental change and open up spaces from where more "ruptural" strategies might become possible.

This paper seeks to better understand efforts and actions by the organic community towards fairness in labour relations in relation to the demands and struggles of racialized migrant farm workers as a counter-narrative to the overall erasure of worker perspectives and privileging of white settler voices in the food movement. Following from the organic community and migrant workers' linked struggles against the exploitative conventional agricultural model, and drawing from Wright and Gibson-Graham to assess efforts to improve social fairness in organic agriculture, we ask: how do the organic community's efforts to enact fairness compare with demands from the migrant justice movement? How do they complicate or complement one another? And, how might they work together to define viable alternatives (where they want to go), and pathways to transformation (how to get there)?

Methodology

This research emerged from a nascent alliance between two BC-based food movement organizations: Fuerza Migrante, a migrant worker collective; and Organic BC, an umbrella association that represents organic certifying agencies in BC. Fuerza Migrante is a volunteer-based organization made up of migrant farm workers and their allies working to build the power,

autonomy, and liberty of migrant workers through mutual aid and community support. With shared goals of better understanding the working conditions for migrants employed in organic agriculture, and supporting action in solidarity with them, Fuerza Migrante and the first author (Klassen) co-organized a 2020 conference session on allyship with migrant workers at the annual Organic BC conference. The co-authors have also worked together to share information and knowledge with the organic sector and in other food movement spaces about the struggles of migrant workers (Fuerza Migrante & Klassen, 2020), and what action in solidarity with migrants looks like (Food Secure Canada, 2020).

Organic BC was formed in 1993 to ensure the consistency and credibility of organic certification in BC, and convenes the provincial organic community—including farmers, inspectors, program administrators, food businesses, and researchers—through their annual conference. This paper specifically examines work towards social fairness emerging from organic community actors affiliated with Organic BC, but some of these initiatives are national in scope (e.g., efforts to integrate social fairness into the national organic standards). We also consider perspectives from across provincial and national borders, as many leaders in the BC organic community are also members of national and international bodies working toward more just food production systems.

The findings presented in the next section are drawn from several distinct phases of data gathering. The first author conducted thirteen semi-structured qualitative interviews with organic community members who have been involved with the efforts to advance labour fairness in organic agriculture. The majority of these participants were from British Columbia (seven) and are actively involved with Organic BC and national organic policy work. Additional interview participants from elsewhere in Canada (four) and the United States (two) were recruited based on their involvement as members of the national organic standards committee and with parallel efforts on labour justice certification standards. These participants included farmers, verification officers, and organic movement or sector leaders, and were conducted between September 2019 and April 2021.⁷ One interview was also conducted with another BC-based migrant rights organization that has collaborated with Organic BC in the past. These interviews were transcribed and coded in NVivo using an inductive coding strategy in order to be sensitive to the specific framing, language and key issues shared by participants.

Findings are also drawn from dozens of hours of participant observation in meetings and gatherings related to farm worker justice, fairness in the organic sector, and solidarity with migrant workers. These sessions occurred between November 2018 and November 2020, and included two gatherings and one panel session in BC, and two national workshops involving BC-based migrant justice organizations. Notes and transcriptions of these sessions were also coded using NVivo software, and were used to triangulate and complement data from interviews. In

⁷ As per our procedures of consent as approved by the Behavioural Research Ethics Board at the University of British Columbia, interview participants who agreed to be identified have been identified by their position where relevant to the research, or remain anonymous.

addition to data gathered through interviews and participant observation, perspectives on and demands for migrant justice were contributed by the Fuerza Migrante collective in their capacity as a co-author of this paper. Finally, we also analyzed migrant advocacy organizations' websites, reports, and advocacy materials.

Findings: Working towards fairness in organics

According to the IFOAM, the principle of fairness is “characterized by equity, respect, justice and stewardship of the shared world, both among people and in their relations to other living beings” (IFOAM-Organics International, 2020, para. 1). Despite the inclusion of fairness as a guiding principle of the Canadian Organic Standards, the standards themselves do not contain a single requirement relating to social fairness, including for workers (Klassen et al., 2022; CGSB, 2020a). Yet, the principle of fairness has been the basis of dynamic conversations across the organic sector. Here, we draw from interview and participant observation data to explore efforts by a group of organic community actors to integrate the principle of fairness into organic agriculture in Canada (section 5.1), including efforts to centre migrant worker voices (section 5.2). In the last part of this section (section 5.3), we interrogate how these efforts and the logics behind them are complicated by the demands of migrant workers and migrant advocacy organizations like Fuerza Migrante.

Integrating labour into organic certification

In Canada, the national organic standards are governed by the Canadian General Standards Board (CGSB) Committee on Organic Agriculture (“the Technical Committee”). This multi-stakeholder committee includes over forty representatives from organizations and associations from across the country (Government of Canada, 2019). They oversee the standards review process that occurs every five years.⁸

In recognition of the disconnect between the organic sector's stated principles and its required practices, several individuals came together to propose a new chapter on social fairness to be added to the standards in the most recent revision process (see Appendix A). The proposal included eleven clauses, most of which are focused on actions for employers to improve conditions for workers.

Despite lengthy discussions, the Technical Committee was not able to achieve consensus about the proposed addition during the latest revision process completed in December 2020. According to several interview participants, some actors involved with discussions at the

⁸ See Nawaz et al., 2020 for further discussion of this process.

Technical Committee objected to the proposal based on the feasibility of implementation for farmers, which mostly centred around the clause recommending that employers pay a living wage, which brought up tensions about the perceived trade-offs between producer viability and conditions for workers. Participants also described the challenge that the Technical Committee faces in balancing enforceability—a crucial aspect of successful standards—with the more aspirational nature of some of the social fairness ideals reflected in the proposed addition. However, reflecting on the debate that they observed at the Technical Committee, one interviewee challenged a common assertion that social fairness standards would be difficult for organic inspectors to enforce: “[You could] check if there are contracts, and for example, if they have a policy for resolving disputes, maybe some time sheets, like if you've got workers...any business is going to have stuff like that! And you could ask a couple of questions and look on the site and it would be like five extra minutes...so I really don't see why they were complaining that it was too many hoops. If they don't have contracts or some arrangement with people they have in, or if they say they are providing housing and they don't” (Interview 11, October 21, 2020).

Other participants felt that the requirements were an unnecessary duplication of existing labour laws. While some participants (both in interviews and participant observation) voiced that they felt the relatively more rigorous inspection regime of the organic sector would be an opportunity to improve compliance with provincial and federal laws, others stated that adding labour-related organic requirements would create an undue burden on the sector to enforce standards that should be the responsibility of the government. While this view was not held by all, the Chair of the Technical Committee elaborated on this as a central reason for objecting to the inclusion of labour clauses in the organic standard: “The overall intention of fairness, from an IFOAM perspective globally, is sometimes seen as being a different conversation in Canada...we have fairly good labour standards in Canada, and we have regulations in Canada. So, it's hard for us to incorporate regulations for labour within the organic standards because that's regulated at a pretty good level” (Interview 5, February 5, 2020).

The assumption that Canada's “fairly good” labour standards and regulations will result in better job quality for workers compared to other jurisdictions is challenged by workers themselves. Advocacy groups emphasize that farmworkers in Canada endure poor working conditions, abuse, and stifled rights, and there are also many barriers to obtaining justice when standards and regulations are not followed (see section 2.2). Furthermore, agricultural work is often excluded from employment standards and legal protections, such as the provincial hourly minimum wage in BC (Weiler & Fairey, 2021), or the right to unionize in Ontario (Vosko, 2018). Moreover, Weiler and Encalada Grez (this issue) demonstrate the ways that governments in Canada have “long relegated migrant farmworkers to a legal space of exclusion, exemption, and exceptionalism” (pp.45).

Rather than the addition of enforceable clauses around working conditions, the committee put forward the addition of an expanded definition of the principle of fairness (Table 1), now included as an annex in the 2020 Canadian Organic Standards (CGSB, 2020a).

Table 1: Expanded definition of the principle of fairness from the Canadian Organic Standards (CGSB, 2020a).

<p>IFOAM Organics International describes fairness as:</p> <p>Organic Agriculture should build on relationships that ensure fairness with regard to the common environment and life opportunities.</p> <p><i>[Expanded definition]</i> Fairness is characterized by equity, respect, justice, and stewardship of the shared world, both among people and in their relations to other living beings.</p> <p>This principle emphasizes that those involved in Organic Agriculture should conduct human relationships in a manner that ensures fairness at all levels and to all parties— farmers, workers, processors, distributors, traders, and consumers. Organic Agriculture should provide everyone involved with a good quality of life, and contribute to food sovereignty and reduction of poverty. It aims to produce a sufficient supply of good quality food and other products.</p> <p>This principle insists that animals should be provided with the conditions and opportunities of life that accord with their physiology, natural behaviour, and wellbeing.</p> <p>Natural and environmental resources that are used for production and consumption should be managed in a way that is socially and ecologically just and should be held in trust for future generations. Fairness requires systems of production, distribution, and trade that are open and equitable and account for real environmental and social costs.</p>
--

Well-defined principles do not guarantee any concrete improvements for farm workers; however, the processes of deliberation and discussion that resulted from the proposal were seen by many interview participants to represent progress towards actualizing fairness in the sector. According to interview participants who have been involved with the organic standards writing process, the Canadian standards allow the stated intent of organic production to guide the interpretation and enforcement of the standards. One organic inspector who was part of the effort to add social fairness requirements described how even the older, more abbreviated definition of fairness has enabled her to investigate working conditions on organic farms: “As I have inspected increasingly large operations across Canada and the US, I see that they have temporary foreign workers, and I have—based on the principles of the organic standard, fairness—asked to see the housing that the people are receiving, and to ask some questions [about working conditions]” (Interview 11, October 21, 2020). As such, the expanded definition of fairness may open up possibilities for verification officers, certification bodies, and the Standards Interpretation Committee to consider alignment between this principle and practices on organic farms, and grounds to decertify or raise complaints about farms who do not demonstrate commitment to fairness in practice.

Another proposition brought forward both in national and provincial discussions was to add voluntary questions about fairness and labour to the certification process. One farmer who also serves on the Technical Committee (Interview 6, February 6, 2020) described this option as a possible “first step”, where farmers can describe some of their practices related to fairness in order to “introduce the idea slowly” to farmers. Reporting on this question could nudge farmers towards making some changes that benefit workers on organic farms, and could also help avoid some of the resistance by farmers that would likely result from suddenly introducing a series of

mandatory labour requirements. Nearly every individual from the organic community interviewed for this research spoke of the importance of a more incremental approach, coupled with intentional dialogue within the community. The Chair of Organic BC board explained:

“I have been involved in informal conversations on [labour and social fairness] and I have seen that needle move a lot.... So I feel like informal conversations about social fairness are of huge value, and I don’t know if formal edits to standards.... I feel like the informal conversations and formal changes to standards should sort of support each other. I feel like the organic movement just has to—especially on this particular issue—the community can’t be dragged kicking and screaming” (Interview 12, December 17, 2020).

Participants articulated an awareness that small changes to certification standards for organic farms do not fully address the many inequities experienced by farmworkers across the agriculture sector more broadly. They also consistently expressed a desire to identify feasible measures that they could take within the bounds of the institutions, expectations, and norms of the organic sector. In other words, participants expressed feeling constrained both by what they perceived as being feasible to implement in the certification process, and what aspects of the organic sector they felt they were in a position to change.

Bringing migrant worker struggles to the fore

Conversations about the links between labour and fairness in the organic sector are not new. In the past, the organic community has paid attention to un[der]paid interns and apprentices after allegations surfaced of exploitation. However, several interview participants noted that the organic sector has “moved away from the WWOOFing and apprenticeships,” implying that possible fairness issues associated with these work arrangements have subsided. The feeling that the community has addressed or moved on from these issues has left more space to discuss the unique struggles of migrant workers, the other major group of workers experiencing unfair conditions in the sector. Where labour fairness issues have been discussed in a broader sense in progressive food movement spaces, the perceived comparison between the experiences of un[der]paid white apprentices with racialized migrant farm workers has resulted in significant tension and warranted pushback from session participants. Based on participant observation in these spaces, elucidating the unique structural conditions that make migrant workers distinctly vulnerable to abuse, exploitation, and health inequities, must be a precursor for enacting labour fairness in organic agriculture.

A central aim of the sessions we have been involved with as part of alternative agriculture and food gatherings—and a central demand from migrant justice organizations—is to make space for and listen to migrant workers themselves, and to centre their voices and

demands. At the 2020 Organic BC Conference, members of Fuerza Migrante shared their experiences and their work to foster migrant power through mutual aid strategies. The conversation was focused on the forms of coercion used by employers as well as the structural barriers for workers to access benefits and realize their rights while in Canada. In particular, a significant portion of the discussion focused on the lack of worker voice in, and knowledge about, their own employment contracts. During this session, a member of Fuerza Migrante described this situation: “[The contract] is always negotiated between the Canadian government, the Mexican government, and employers. The voices of the workers are not included in this situation. We can see that workers of course have a lot to say about the contract, but there is nothing really in place to have their voice included.”

Another collective member from Fuerza Migrante also raised that sometimes workers don’t even have access to their contracts, either because they are not given a copy, or they are only given a copy in English. Reflecting on this session several months later, one interview participant from the organic community recalled: “That was the thing that made my jaw drop about their presentation. [That there is] no representation of workers around the tables where these agreements are being negotiated is like —Wait. What? That doesn't even make any sense! [Contracts] provided in English only. Like oh my god this is freakin crazy!” (Interview 12, December 17, 2020). In response to this and other instances of the structural disempowerment of workers, conference participants brainstormed possible actions that they could take, echoing the concerns and issues being raised.

Both attendees and organizers of these sessions seem to recognize the imperative to centre the experiences and voices of migrant workers themselves. However, Fuerza Migrante reminds us that these efforts are still preliminary, and better representation of migrant workers in these conversations is still needed. In a discussion session about allyship with food workers at a recent food movement gathering, a member of Fuerza Migrante put it frankly, describing the concrete improvements they are seeking: “The employer asks that [the worker] complies with the working hours, with the farm regulations...but he hardly fulfills his part of the contract to be responsible for our health, for our payments, our housing conditions.... And that is what I would like to see at the end of all this. Thank you for the invitation [to speak], but still.... I would like everyone to reach a more physical contribution, a more sincere contribution, a significant contribution...to really raise awareness.”

Discussions within the organic community about social fairness and labour, even when focussed on struggles of migrant workers, have largely been limited to the scope of the organic certification processes; however, they do show indications of the beginning of a process of reckoning about the responsibility of the organic sector to better understand and advocate for the issues facing migrant agricultural workers. Along these lines, the author team has been involved with several efforts to improve access to data about employment of migrant workers on organic farms, and access to information for organic farmers who employ migrant workers (Fuerza Migrante & Klassen, 2020). Recently, an Organic BC board member who sits on a federal agriculture committee raised concerns with the committee’s chair that a push for “less red tape”

for bringing migrant workers to Canada could translate to lower standards, and suggested the government consult with a migrant rights group before making any changes to the TFWP. However small, they attributed this action on their part to their enhanced awareness of migrant worker struggles as a result of one of the sessions with Fuerza Migrante at the Organic BC conference.

In Table 2, we summarize the propositions from the organic community to recognize the voices and challenges of migrant workers, and to integrate labour fairness into the organic certification process. These efforts contribute to educating a larger public about the structural injustices facing migrant workers, but they also help to position these injustices as ones that should be shared by the broader food movements—for food security, sovereignty, and justice—that they represent.

Table 2: Efforts and proposed actions proposed by the organic community to address social fairness for workers.

Effort or Proposed Action	Goal	Scale/Location of Observed Intervention	Status
A. integrating fairness requirements into the Canadian Organic Standard	include working conditions in organic inspections; possibility to de-certify for infractions	national; discussion happening at the technical committee of the CGSB process	proposed; deferred until 2025 revision process
B. expanding the definition of fairness in the Canadian Organic Standard	further articulate the centrality of fairness in organic agriculture, including for farm workers; open up space for further integration of concrete standards	national; decision made by the technical committee of the CGSB process	published in Appendix C of 2020 organic standards.
C. integrating labour considerations into the certification process in a voluntary way	raise awareness about what is expected of organic farmers and employers; employer education that could lead to possible action	proposal has been raised both at the national technical committee, and for a subset of BC organic certification bodies	proposed
D. increasing employer education on labour fairness issues in organic sector	improve organic sector's access to information about migrant workers on organic farms; inspire action to support improvements	provincial in BC (but likely happening elsewhere in decentralized ways)	nascent; preliminary interest and action by organic association in BC
E. centering voices and experiences of migrant workers	community education and representation; make visible and listen to the experiences of racialized migrant farm workers within organic and broader food movement spaces	national; many spaces and organizations across Canada (e.g., the national farmers union, food secure Canada), including at gatherings of organic BC	nascent
F. amplifying demands from migrant workers (e.g., status for all on arrival)	increase collective power of these calls for action; democratic participation as citizens as opposed to	N/A	nascent; preliminary interest and action by some organic community members.

	individual action as employers or consumers		
--	---	--	--

A progressive-radical alliance?

The efforts by the organic community described in the preceding sections represent progress towards the principle of fairness in the Canadian organic sector. However, towards the goal of solidarity and alliance-building with more “radical” demands for justice, we must ask how the logics and strategies espoused by those working towards fairness in organics complement and contrast with the central demands of migrant justice organizations like Fuerza Migrante.

Table 3 summarizes some of the key efforts, logic, and strategies being advanced by movements advocating for migrant justice and fairness in organics, respectively. When it comes to fairness, participants from the organic community have focused significant efforts on making institutional changes within the sector to address labour as an aspect of social justice (as outlined in section 5.1). However, the proposal to add a clause recommending workers be paid a livable wage has prompted objections from producers based on perceptions of financial viability and competitiveness, which is linked to larger debates about how our current capitalist societies artificially determine the cost of food with little regard for sustainability and community needs. Moreover, the demand for higher wages is not always articulated as a priority demand for migrant workers.⁹ The organic community’s focus internally is in contrast to the clearly articulated demands of migrant worker advocacy groups from across Canada for broader structural changes to the federal government programs across all agricultural sectors (see migrant justice demands summarized as background in section 2.2), interventions that will require more collective power.

⁹ While some migrant advocacy groups do not articulate higher wages as among their key demands for change, in their work to build a worker-centred contract for migrant agricultural workers, Fuerza Migrante articulates higher wages as one of several demands.

Table 3: Contrasting strategies and logics of the movements for fairness in organics and Migrant Justice using the cases of organic community participants from Organic BC and Fuerza Migrante.

	Migrant Justice	Fairness in Organics
Diagnosis of problem	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explicit calls for multi-dimensional solidarity rooted in anti-oppression, anti-capitalist, and anti-patriarchal critiques. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Acknowledges role of capitalism and colonialism in creating food systems injustices.
Gaps in knowledge or capacity identified	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Importance of internal capacity building in anti-oppression strategies (including anti-colonial and anti-paternalistic). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Acknowledges gaps in knowledge about worker experiences and extent of migrant labour on organic farms.
Concepts employed in framing of solutions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Framed around concepts of solidarity, liberty, mutual aid, collective power, justice, community. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Framed around concepts of regeneration, sustainability, fairness, care, humane treatment, social/food justice, community.
Central proposal or strategy for change	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Structural reform of migrant worker programs focussing on status for all on arrival, equal access to rights and protections, and an end to tied work permits. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Integration of labour and broader fairness considerations into certification processes.
Additional strategies for change	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Education and support for workers to realize their rights. • End the “whitewashing” of agriculture. • Incorporate workers’ voices in decision making processes that impact them. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Education for employers. • Support more racially and culturally diverse voices within organic sector. • Incorporate worker perspectives into organic sector discussions.

Migrant justice organizations, researchers and advocates aren’t only advocating for an overhaul of the structure of TFWPs, but improved enforcement of existing rules, regulations, and laws that are in place to protect workers. Fuerza Migrante has voiced a need for effective ways to ensure compliance with existing regulations, and the fair application of existing laws to migrant workers’ claims and complaints. In some ways, this way of thinking is in line with some arguments made at the Organic Technical Committee against the integration of labour standards into organics, as these should be the responsibility of the government to enforce.

These policy and regulations-focused actions are not the only strategies being advanced by migrant justice organizations. Fuerza Migrante is also working to build collective migrant power through mutual aid strategies. In other words, they see value in intervening *outside* of state-sponsored programs and political institutions, including conventional union structures (Fuerza Migrante, 2020). One aspect of this capacity building involves educating workers about the rights they are entitled to, and providing support for them to access these rights. According to one migrant advocate:

“Our view is that educating the workers is much more effective than educating the employers because first of all, the employers already have a legal obligation to know the laws. And, when workers are empowered to know what their rights are, they can take steps to stand up for them. You can educate employers all you like, but if they know they have a workforce that is uneducated about the same things, there is really

nothing to stop them from taking advantage of that lack of education”
(Interview 8, October 14, 2020).

In this interview, this participant went on to offer for their organization to conduct workshops with migrant workers on organic farms to better educate them about the rights, protections, and benefits that they should have access to in Canada. A focus on worker empowerment through education was not explicitly discussed by participants from the organic community, whose emphasis has largely been on employer-focused changes. This conflicts with the views expressed by many migrant justice organizations, as exemplified in the preceding quote, who have articulated not only the imperative to empower *workers* (as opposed to educating employers), but also for this education to come from worker-led movements themselves. The focus on employers, standards, and certification is likely a result of the perceived room to maneuver with farmers being the focus of the organic sector; however, the tensions observed here suggest that supporting migrant justice organizers to educate workers on organic farms (i.e., education by migrant workers for migrant workers) could represent a complementary approach to the organic community’s efforts to change standards and certification processes (Table 3).

Migrant worker advocacy groups also highlight the racialized dimensions of labour inequities, and the imperative to take structural racism into account when identifying or pursuing solutions. Organizations advocating for migrant justice prioritize discussions of race and racism, such as the recent campaign on Twitter by J4MW to “Stop whitewashing agriculture” (Justice4MigrantWkrs [@J4MW], 2020). Fuerza Migrante names racism as a structural problem impacting the lives of migrant workers, and is working to build internal capacity to integrate anti-oppression strategies, including anti-paternalistic and anti-colonial practice, to ensure they are not perpetuating these systems and structures within their own organization. They have also articulated the imperative for those aspiring to be “allies” to work to address the structural oppression faced by migrant workers in several of the gatherings and conference sessions they have been a part of. For example, one collective member articulated in a gathering how true allyship would “contribute to the destruction of dynamics of power and oppression of the temporary foreign workers.... So if you really want to support migrant workers, you need to take this seriously, and you need to understand that you come to support the workers’ struggle, and for their benefit. Not for your benefit” (Fuerza Migrante, November 16, 2020).

Like many “progressive” food movement factions, organic sector participants from Organic BC have voiced the importance of having more racial and cultural diversity at the decision-making table (Participant observation, February 2020), and two interview participants brought up their personal work towards decolonization and anti-oppression in their local communities and personal lives. However, during the course of this research, neither Organic BC nor the national organic sector institutions explicitly named the role of structural racism and their responsibility to address it. When asked how much the organic community explicitly talks about systemic racism, especially in relation to labour and farm workers, the Organic BC Board Chair

responded: “At the [Organic BC] level, not much. Except on committees where again we are like, ‘okay we’re not very inclusive at this organization’.” The difference in explicit structural analysis of the roots from where social justice issues stem between “progressive” organizations like Organic BC and more “radical” ones like Fuerza Migrante may present a barrier to a productive and positive alliances in the future.

Fuerza Migrante has also expressed caution against the tokenistic representation of people of colour seen in many food movement spaces, and the importance of migrant workers themselves bringing their experiences and voices to weigh into decisions made about the conditions that impact their lives. Perhaps the most visible tension that arises from contrasting these strategies is current paucity of migrant worker voices or representation at any formal decision-making table in the organic sector (e.g., as a voting member of the Technical Committee). If the organic community is to take seriously the demands for improved representation of migrant justice organizations in planning and decision making, more formal representation in governance may be the most logical place to start—for instance, inviting and providing appropriate supports for migrant justice organizations to sit on the CGSB Technical Committee as a voting member.

While the two groups articulate different analyses of the problems at hand with respect to fairness and justice in the food system (see table 3), they share a common recognition of the role that capitalism has played in the exploitation of both human and ecological systems. This is exemplified by the synergies between the key concepts used in their framing of solutions and better futures rooted in justice, fairness, and community. We would like to emphasize that not all organic community members identify with an opposition to, or desire to move beyond, capitalism. This was an issue raised by several interview participants, naming that “[they’re] not all lefties” (Interview 3, January 16, 2020). However, many members of the organic community moving this agenda forward in BC and elsewhere in Canada have explicitly raised the role of capitalism as the root of problems facing the organic sector, both in interviews and more public fora.

Despite some complementarity, the differences between approaches and the informal nature of the current collaboration—facilitated in large part through scholar-activism—should not be overlooked. The majority of the efforts by the organic community highlighted in this research (Table 2) do not respond to the principal demands by migrant justice organizations and their allies (see section 2.2). Fuerza Migrante, the authors and Organic BC, are still “feeling our way” through a potential form of collaboration that can be helpful to each of our respective lines of work, and no formal plan, project, or initiative, nor working group has as yet been formed. Contrasting the central demands of these two movements may help facilitate this process by naming and working through the political tensions between the two groups (e.g., the employer-focused nature of Organic BC, and the worker-focused nature of Fuerza Migrante). Perhaps these differences will also encourage the organic community to look past organic standards and certification reform to the broader horizon of political demands and representation of migrants in discussions about more just agriculture and food futures.

Discussion

What does theory about social transformation tell us about the efforts by members of the organic community to advance social fairness? The strategies and efforts in Table 2 can be characterized in terms of different logics of transformation articulated by Wright (2010): (1) interstitial transformations, where actors build new forms of social empowerment in the niches and margins of capitalist society where they do not appear to threaten dominant classes and elites; and (2) symbiotic transformations, where increases in social empowerment are sought in ways that simultaneously solve problems for the dominant class on the terrain of the state or by using the state.

Through our conversations and engagement with organic community members advancing work on social fairness, we can see processes of *interstitial* transformation at work in the social movement spaces convened by organizations like Organic BC, which are reinforcing links between migrant struggles and the alternative enterprises and labour relations that the organic movement seeks to foster. This is the social movement work of the organic sector, where a heterogeneity of interests, identities, and constituencies are coming together under shared and articulated values. For Wright (2010), success in interstitial strategies depends on the identification of inhabitable niches; organic actors who participated in this research identified several of such “niches” outside the institutional bounds of organic standards, such as centering the voices of migrant workers in community gatherings and public fora, and advocating for migrant worker participation in decision making.

The petition to add enforceable clauses to the national organic standards can be considered a form of *symbiotic* transformation. Here, actors from the organic community proposing the addition of labour requirements have identified a strategic convergence of interests between consumer expectations and organic values. The expectations of the public that organic should foster an ethic of social justice is not only in alignment with the sector’s stated value of fairness, but with the interest of the organic sector as a whole to maintain its status as a more ethical alternative to “conventional” food production (Bell, 1980; Seufert et al., 2017).

This work to change the standards is in many ways typical of the “progressive” faction of the food movement, as it seeks to advance a practical alternative to the conventional food system (Holt-Giménez & Shattuck, 2011). Yet, the transformative potential of this work seems to be challenged by a broader tendency of food movement actors to focus on the food system itself, and especially on individuals’ food-related choices, rather than broader politics of societal change (Levkoe & Wilson, this issue). Many critical scholars have identified shortcomings of certification and consumer-focused labelling strategies, including the burden they place on the consumer (Weiler et al., 2016a); the lack of involvement and voice of farmworkers in their development (Sowerwine et al., 2015); and the way that they excuse inaction by governments (Brown & Getz, 2008). Fuerza Migrante and other migrant rights advocates have made complementary arguments, advocating for improved representation of migrant workers,

improved enforcement of existing laws and regulations by governments, and the end to the “agricultural exceptionalism” and unwillingness to upset farmers, which has played a key role in reproducing unfair labour conditions (Erwin, 2016; Rodman et al., 2016).

Notwithstanding these critiques, Wright points out the value of such symbiotic strategies to “open up” spaces for future transformation. For participants who engaged with us for this research, making changes to the organic certification process is the most accessible form of systemic intervention available to them. If changes to these institutional frameworks can also be a pathway for farmworker voices and demands to enter into the discussion, struggles over changes to the national organic standards could be a space for solidarity and movement building for food justice (Alkon, 2014; Allen & Kovach, 2000). To do so effectively, the organic community will need to work through some of the tensions between these movements outlined in section 5.3 (such as a more explicit analysis of structural oppressions), and of course, migrants, migrant justice organizations, and their allies will then decide for themselves whether this kind of alliance is worth their time and energy to build.

Previous research has highlighted the resistance of alternative food movement actors to formal accountability systems and added bureaucracy, and cautions that this aversion may limit the possibilities for fair and dignified work (Weiler et al., 2016b). However, the perspectives shared by participants in this research suggest that this aversion to formal accountability mechanisms may have been surmounted following the creation of the Canadian Organic Regime. Several participants from the organic community admitted that they had been hesitant to support the institutionalization of organic certification processes at the national scale, but now see the benefits of working with government to legitimize the sector. Viewing the strategies summarized above in Tables 2 and 3 in this light, the institutionalization of the organic sector over the last several decades may actually help overcome the “anti-politics” barrier discussed by Weiler et al., (2016b) and open up further possibilities for the organic community to work with and within institutions under the purview of the state (e.g., national certification) through symbiotic strategies, in addition to working outside of it through interstitial strategies.

The organic community’s efforts to enact institutionalized improvements toward fairness (which may act as guarantees for consumers) may be seen as a continued attempt to persist and compete within a predominantly capitalist, industrial, and large-scale farming industry (Ekers et al., 2016). While improvements that require financial investments (e.g., requiring organic farmers to pay a living wage) may disadvantage organic farmers in the marketplace, improvements to labour conditions and job quality on organic farms that are predicated on social empowerment and non-monetary benefits may aid the sector in differentiation from conventional methods, re-asserting their claim over their alternative agricultural niche and its consumers. Moreover, these improvements to job quality could accrue broader benefits to the organic sector by attracting and retaining workers, including the children of organic farmers. Several of the core demands of migrant workers also hold potential to “level the playing field” between organic producers and their conventional counterparts, such as the end to tied work permits and granting of permanent residency status, which would enable workers not only to safely flee poor working

conditions without risk of repatriation, but to move freely to operations that offer more fair and safe alternatives.

In a sense, both the organic community and migrant advocacy groups are already engaging in a politics of possibility for constructing new forms of “economic politics” (or re-socializing economic relations), though they engage with these alternatives in different ways, and for the most part they are doing so separately. Through their strategies of mutual aid and collective governance, migrant workers and allies are engaging in new practices of the self through self-development as citizens and collective members, and through their cultivation of multidimensional solidarity. Though from an objectively more privileged position, the organic community members seeking changes to norms and practices in the organic sector are finding ways to exercise this power after realistic consideration of the limits and constraints that affect their ability to maneuver (Gibson-Graham, 2006).

For these symbiotic strategies to be successful and create fertile ground for alliances, the organic community will need to be careful not to tokenize participation or representation of migrant workers in their efforts to maintain consumer trust, as this could cause harm to migrant communities in the process. As Saima Habib thoughtfully describes in her reflection on her work in poverty reduction and community food security, transformative work must stem from a place of interconnectedness and mutuality, and be rooted in relationships (Habib, this issue). Similarly, Laura-Anne Minkoff-Zern’s (2014, 2018) research shows the transformative potential of redistributing power to workers, including where workers were embraced as leaders, and where traditional producer-consumer and employer-worker binaries are challenged. What offers the most potential based on our analysis would be for the organic community to deepen their conversations about the role of capitalism, racism, and patriarchy in the exploitation of people and the land, which holds potential for common struggle, and to use their institutional influence to advance migrant worker demands.

Conclusion

For the majority of participants in this study—including those who were interviewed, those who participated in the many discussion sessions, and the author team—the current unjust labour relations in agriculture are not immutable. In an attempt to make visible this work towards fairness in organics, we have summarized current efforts for change, highlighted instances of interstitial transformation (alongside efforts for more symbiotic transformation), and raised possibilities and barriers to igniting alternative relationships between farm workers and the organic community, particularly those of solidarity. Perhaps more powerful than the actions towards making concrete changes to the organic certification process, this paper documents nascent efforts towards redistribution of power and the re-centering of voices in a way that could be transformative.

While efforts towards fairness by the organic community appear promising, these efforts and the logics that they emerge from are complicated by those of migrant justice movements, which epitomize labour-related struggles for justice in the food system. Indeed, the primary concerns and demands raised by migrant workers and their allies are for large-scale structural changes to TFWPs, such as the end to tied work permits, and improved oversight and enforcement of existing regulations designed to protect migrants. These are not yet mirrored by the organic sector's efforts to improve fairness in labour relations; however, evidence presented here does not preclude such political and collective action by the organic association and its members. The organic sector has a history of wading into politically controversial topics (for example, the governance and regulation of genetic engineering technologies), and both movements identify with goals of justice, and articulate a common enemy of industrial, extractive, and exploitative agricultural production. Despite this potential, true solidarity with migrant workers must go beyond incorporating fairness into organic certification to include real actions from the organic community to redistribute power and voice to workers, and demonstrated commitment to using their relative privilege to add weight to migrant worker demands for structural changes to TFWPs. Such changes could represent progress toward crafting a true alternative to the dominant food system in terms of labour relations. These moments of interstitial transformation appear to be opening up spaces for further expansion of social emancipation for workers on organic farms; whether this will open up a pathway for meaningful alliances with migrant workers struggling for justice is yet to be seen.

Acknowledgements: We thank all participants who shared their invaluable perspectives and time for this research, especially members of migrant justice organizations and Organic BC. This work was conducted on the traditional, ancestral, unceded, and occupied territory of the hən̓q̓əmin̓əm̓ speaking xʷmə θ kʷəy̓əm.

References

- Alkon, A. H. (2008). Paradise or pavement: The social constructions of the environment in two urban farmers' markets and their implications for environmental justice and sustainability. *Local Environment*, 13(3), 271–289. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13549830701669039>
- Alkon, A. H. (2013). The Socio-nature of local organic food. *Antipode*, 45(3), 663–680. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-8330.2012.01056.x>
- Alkon, A. H. (2014). Food justice and the challenge to neoliberalism. *Gastronomica*, 14(2), 27–40. <https://doi.org/10.1525/gfc.2014.14.2.27>
- Allen, P., & Kovach, M. (2000). The capitalist composition of organic: The potential of markets in fulfilling the promise of organic agriculture. *Agriculture and Human Values*, 17, 221–232. <https://doi.org/10.1023/a:1007640506965>
- Araiza, L. (2009). “In common struggle against a common oppression”: The United Farm Workers and the Black Panther Party, 1968-1973. *The Journal of African American History*, 94(2), 200–223. <https://doi.org/10.1086/JAAHv94n2p200>
- Barnetson, B., Caxaj, C. S., Cohen, A., Cole, D., Colindres, C., Drolet, N., Foster, J., Hanley, J., Hennebry, J. L., Huesca, E., Mayell, S., McLaughlin, J., Tew, M., Clinic, H., & Vosko, L. (2020). *Recommendations for overcoming health challenges faced by migrant agricultural workers during the COVID-19-virus pandemic*. Health gaps and challenges- Migrant worker health expert working group. <http://www.migrantworker.ca/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/HC-recommendations-June-1-2020.pdf>
- Bell, D. A. (1980). Brown v. Board of Education and the interest-convergence dilemma. *Harvard Law Review*, 93(3), 518. <https://doi.org/10.2307/1340546>
- Binford, L. (2009). From Fields of Power to Fields of Sweat: The dual process of constructing temporary migrant labour in Mexico and Canada. *Third World Quarterly*, 30(3), 503–517. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01436590902742297>
- Brown, S., & Getz, C. (2008). Privatizing farm worker justice: Regulating labor through voluntary certification and labeling. *Geoforum*, 39(3), 1184–1196. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.geoforum.2007.01.002>
- Buck, D., Getz, C., & Guthman, J. (1997). From farm to table: The organic vegetable commodity chain of Northern California. *Sociologia Ruralis*, 37(1), 3–20.
- Cairns, K., Johnston, J., & Mackendrick, N. (2013). Feeding the ‘organic child’: Mothering through ethical consumption. *Journal of Consumer Culture*, 13(2), 97–118. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1469540513480162>

- Calo, A. (2020). The yeoman myth: A troubling foundation of the beginning farmer movement. *Gastronomica*, 12(2), 12–29. <https://doi.org/10.1525/GFC.2020.20.2.12>.
- Carlisle, L., Montenegro de Wit, M., DeLonge, M. S., Iles, A., Calo, A., Getz, C., Ory, J., Munden-Dixon, J., Galt, R., Melone, B., Knox, R., & Press, D. (2019). Transitioning to sustainable agriculture requires growing and sustaining an ecologically skilled workforce. *Frontiers in Sustainable Food Systems*, 3. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fsufs.2019.00096>
- Carter, S. (2019). *Lost harvests: Prairie Indian reserve farmers and government policy (2nd ed.)*. McGill-Queen's University Press.
- Canadian General Standards Board (CGSB). (2020a). *Organic production systems: General principles and management standards*. National Standard of Canada CAN/CGSB-32.310-2020. <http://www.publications.gc.ca/site/eng/9.854643/publication.html>
- Canadian General Standards Board (CGSB). (2020b). *Organic production systems: Permitted substances lists*. National standard of Canada; CAN/CGSB-32.311-2020. <https://publications.gc.ca/site/eng/9.894398/publication.html>
- Caxaj, C. S., & Cohen, A. (2019). “I will not leave my body here”: Migrant farmworkers’ health and safety amidst a climate of coercion. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 16(15), 2643. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph16152643>
- Costa, C., García-lestón, J., Costa, S., Coelho, P., Silva, S., Pingarilho, M., Valdiglesias, V., Mattei, F., Dall, V., Bonassi, S., Laffon, B., Snawder, J., & Paulo, J. (2014). Is organic farming safer to farmers’ health? A comparison between organic and traditional farming. *Toxicology Letters*, 230(2), 166–176. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.toxlet.2014.02.011>
- Cross, P., Edwards, R. T., Hounsome, B., & Edwards-Jones, G. (2008). Comparative assessment of migrant farm worker health in conventional and organic horticultural systems in the United Kingdom. *Science of the Total Environment*, 391(1), 55–65. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.scitotenv.2007.10.048>
- Daschuk, J. (2013). *Clearing the plains: Disease, politics of starvation, and the loss of Aboriginal life*. University of Regina Press.
- Ekers, M., Levkoe, C. Z., Walker, S., & Dale, B. (2016). Will work for food: Agricultural interns, apprentices, volunteers, and the agrarian question. *Agriculture and Human Values*, 33(3), 705–720. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10460-015-9660-5>
- Employment and Social Development Canada. (2020a). *Number of temporary foreign worker (TFW) positions on positive labour market impact assessments (LMIA) under the primary agriculture stream by province/territory*. <https://open.canada.ca/data/en/dataset/e8745429-21e7-4a73-b3f5-90a779b78d1e#wb-auto-6>

- Employment and Social Development Canada. (2020b, July 7). *Hire a temporary foreign agricultural worker [Program descriptions]*. Temporary foreign worker program. <https://www.canada.ca/en/employment-social-development/services/foreign-workers/agricultural.html>
- Erwin, A. (2016). Pondering farmworker justice: The visible and invisible borders of social change. *Journal of Agriculture, Food Systems, and Community Development*, 6(2), 29–33. <https://doi.org/10.5304/jafscd.2016.062.007>
- Faraday, F. (2012). *Made in Canada: How the law constructs migrant workers' insecurity*. Metcalf Foundation. <https://metcalffoundation.com/publication/made-in-canada-how-the-law-constructs-migrant-workers-insecurity/>
- Food Secure Canada. (2020, November 24). *Cultivating change: Allyship in labour rights and decent work—Cultivating Change 2020* [Video]. Youtube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hXGCteXOxYA&ab_channel=FoodSecureCanada
- Friedmann, H. (2005). From Colonialism to Green Capitalism: Social Movements and Emergence of Food Regimes. *Research in Rural Sociology and Development*, 11(05), 227–264. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S1057-1922\(05\)11009-9](https://doi.org/10.1016/S1057-1922(05)11009-9)
- Fuerza Migrante. (2020, May 21). *Multidimensional solidarity: Building migrant power means challenging hegemonic masculinity*. Fuerza Migrante. <https://fuerzamigrante.ca/2020/multidimensional-solidarity-building-migrant-power-means-challenging-hegemonic-masculinity/>
- Fuerza Migrante, & Klassen, S. (2020). *Supporting the Health and Wellbeing of Migrant Agricultural Workers on Organic Farms in BC During COVID-19*. The Centre for Sustainable Food Systems, University of British Columbia. https://bcfoodweb.ca/sites/default/files/res_files/Info%20sheet-%20oct5_EN.pdf
- Galt, R. E. (2013). The moral economy is a double-edged sword: Explaining farmer earnings and self-exploitation in community supported agriculture. *Economic Geography*, 89(4), 341–365. <https://doi.org/10.1111/ecge.12015>
- Garcia, M. (2013). A moveable feast: The UFW grape boycott and farm worker justice. *International Labor and Working-Class History*, 83, 146–153. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0147547913000021>
- Gibson-Graham, J. K. (2006). *A postcapitalist politics*. University of Minnesota Press.
- Government of Canada. (2019, November 6). *Standards development*. Public services and procurement Canada. <https://www.tpsgc-pwgsc.gc.ca/ongc-cgsb/programme-program/normes-standards/index-eng.html>

- Government of Canada. (2021, March 24). *CIMM - Seasonal Agricultural Workers in Canada: Pathways to Permanent Residency - Nov 25, 2020*. <https://www.canada.ca/en/immigration-refugees-citizenship/corporate/transparency/committees/cimm-nov-25-2020/cimm-seasonal-agricultural-workers-canada-pathways-permanent-residency-nov-25-2020.html>
- Gray, M. (2014). *Labor and the locavore: The making of a comprehensive food ethic*. University of California Press.
- Guthman, J. (2004). The trouble with ‘organic lite’ in California: A rejoinder to the “conventionalisation” debate. *Sociologia Ruralis*, 44(3). <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9523.2004.00277.x>
- Guthman, J. (2014). *Agrarian Dreams: The Paradox of Organic Farming in California* (Second Edition). University of California Press.
- Guthman, J. (2017). Willing (White) Workers on Organic Farms? Reflections on Volunteer Farm Labor and the Politics of Precarity. *Gastronomica*, 17(1), 15–19. <https://doi.org/10.1525/gfc.2017.17.1.15>
- Habib, S. (2022). Opportunity in crisis: shifting public will to transform food systems. *Canadian Food Studies / La Revue Canadienne des études sur l'alimentation* 9(2), 64-74. <https://doi.org/10.15353/cfs-rcea.v9i2.538>
- Haley, E., Caxaj, S., George, G., Hennebry, J., Martell, E., & McLaughlin, J. (2020). Migrant farmworkers face heightened vulnerabilities during COVID-19. *Journal of Agriculture, Food Systems, and Community Development*, 9(3), 1–5. <https://doi.org/10.5304/jafscd.2020.093.016>
- Harrison, J. L., & Getz, C. (2015). Farm size and job quality: Mixed-methods studies of hired farm work in California and Wisconsin. *Agriculture and Human Values*, 32, 1–18. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10460-014-9575-6>
- Heckman, J. (2006). A history of organic farming: Transitions from Sir Albert Howard’s war in the soil to USDA national organic program. *Renewable Agriculture and Food Systems*, 21(3), 143–150. <https://doi.org/10.1079/RAF2005126>
- Heim, T. (2020, October 12). *The Indigenous origins of regenerative agriculture*. National Farmers Union. <https://nfu.org/2020/10/12/the-indigenous-origins-of-regenerative-agriculture/>
- Hennebry, J., McLaughlin, J., & Preibisch, K. (2016). Out of the loop: (In)access to health care for migrant workers in Canada. *Journal of International Migration and Integration*, 17(2), 521–538. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12134-015-0417-1>
- Holt-Giménez, E., Brent, Z., & Shattuck, A. (2010). *Food workers—Food justice: Linking food, labor, and immigrant rights*. Institute for food and development policy.

https://archive.foodfirst.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/12/BK16_2-summer-2010-food-workers-food-justice.pdf

Holt-Giménez, E., & Shattuck, A. (2011). Food crises, food regimes and food movements: Rumblings of reform or tides of transformation? *The Journal of Peasant Studies*, 38(1), 109–144. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03066150.2010.538578>

Huang, Y., Edirisinghe, I., & Burton-Freeman, B. M. (2016). Low-income shoppers and fruit and vegetables: What do they think? *Nutrition Today*, 51(5), 242–250. <https://doi.org/10.1097/NT.0000000000000176>

International Federation of Organic Agriculture Movements (IFOAM) Organics International. (2019). *The IFOAM norms for organic production and processing (version 2014)*. [https://letis.org/docs/espanol/organicos/ifoam/ifoam_norms_version_july_2014%20\(1\).pdf](https://letis.org/docs/espanol/organicos/ifoam/ifoam_norms_version_july_2014%20(1).pdf)

International Federation of Organic Agriculture Movements (IFOAM) Organics International. (2020). *The principle of fairness*. <https://ifoam.bio/why-organic/principles-organic-agriculture/principle-fairness>

Jaffee, D., & Howard, P. H. (2010). Corporate cooptation of organic and fair trade standards. *Agriculture and Human Values*, 27(4), 387–399. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10460-009-9231-8>

Justice4MigrantWkers [@j4mw]. (2020, October 8). *It's time to stop erasing BIPOC folks in our food system!! Images of white faces have dominated recent ads focussing*[Tweet]. Twitter. <https://twitter.com/j4mw/status/1314340557297254401>

Keung, N. (2010, September 22). *Inquest sought into migrant farm worker deaths*. Thestar.Com. https://www.thestar.com/news/investigations/2010/09/22/inquest_sought_into_migrant_farm_worker_deaths.html

Klassen, S., Kremen, C., Ramankutty, N., & Wittman, H. (2022). Diversification, labour and job quality on organic farms: A survey-based approach. *Manuscript in Preparation*.

Klassen, S., Luna Perez, E., Bridson, N., Castrejón Violante, L., Wittman, H., & Ramankutty, N. (2022). Beyond Equivalency: A Comparison of Governance and Sustainability in North American Organic Standards. *Manuscript in Preparation*.

Kröger, M., & Schäfer, M. (2014). Between ideals and reality: Development and implementation of fairness standards in the organic food sector. *Journal of Agricultural and Environmental Ethics*, 27(1), 43–63. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10806-013-9444-0>

Lockeretz, W. (Ed.). (2007). *Organic farming: An international history*. CABI.

McMichael, P. (2005). Global Development and The Corporate Food Regime. In F. H. Buttel & P. McMichael (Eds.), *New Directions in the Sociology of Global Development* (pp. 265–299). Elsevier.

- Migrant Workers Alliance for Change. (2020). Unheeded warnings: COVID-19 & migrant workers in Canada. <https://migrantworkersalliance.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/Unheeded-Warnings-COVID19-and-Migrant-Workers.pdf>
- Minkoff-Zern, L.-A. (2014). Challenging the Agrarian Imaginary: Farmworker-led food movements and the potential for farm labor justice. *Human Geography*, 7(1), 85–101.
- Minkoff-Zern, L.-A. (2018). Race, immigration and the agrarian question: Farmworkers becoming farmers in the United States. *The Journal of Peasant Studies*, 45(2), 389–408. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03066150.2017.1293661>
- Moore, J. W. (2003). The Modern World-System as environmental history? Ecology and the rise of capitalism. *Theory and Society*, 32, 307–377.
- Nawaz, S., Klassen, S., & Lyon, A. (2020). Tensions at the boundary: Rearticulating ‘organic’ plant breeding in the age of gene editing. *Elementa: Science of the Anthropocene*, 8(1), 34. <https://doi.org/10.1525/elementa.429>
- Obach, B. K. (2015). *Organic struggle: The movement for sustainable agriculture in the United States*. The MIT Press.
- Otero, G., & Preibisch, K. (2010). *Farmworker health and safety: Challenges for British Columbia*. Simon Fraser University.
- Otero, G. (2011). Neoliberal Globalization, NAFTA, and Migration: Mexico’s Loss of Food and Labor Sovereignty. *Journal of Poverty*, 15(4), 384–402. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10875549.2011.614514>
- Otero, G., & Preibisch, K. (2015). *Citizenship and precarious labour in Canadian agriculture*. Canadian centre for policy alternatives. <https://policyalternatives.ca/publications/reports/citizenship-and-precarious-labour-canadian-agriculture>
- Philpott, T. (2020, November 19). *The racist roots of Joel Salatin’s agrarian dream*. Mother Jones. <https://www.motherjones.com/food/2020/11/joel-salatin-chris-newman-farming-rotational-grazing-agriculture/>
- Preibisch, K., & Otero, G. (2014). Does citizenship status matter in Canadian agriculture? Workplace health and safety for migrant and immigrant laborers. *Rural Sociology*, 79(2), 174–199. <https://doi.org/10.1111/ruso.12043>
- Reeves, M., Katten, A., & Guzmán, M. (2002). *Fields of poison 2002: California farmworkers and pesticides*. Californians for Pesticide Reform.
- Reganold, J. P., & Wachter, J. M. (2016). Organic agriculture in the twenty-first century. *Nature Plants*, 2, 15221. <https://doi.org/10.1038/nplants.2015.221>

- Rodman, S. O., Barry, C. L., Clayton, M. L., Frattatoli, S., Neff, R. A., & Rutkow, L. (2016). Agricultural exceptionalism at the state level: Characterization of wage and hour laws for U.S. farmworkers. *Journal of Agriculture, Food Systems, and Community Development*, 6(2), 89–110. <https://doi.org/10.5304/jafscd.2016.062.013>
- Rosol, M., Holt-Giménez, E., Kepkiewicz, L., & Vibert, E. (2022). Towards just food futures: Divergent approaches and possibilities for collaboration across difference. *Canadian Food Studies / La Revue Canadienne Des Études Sur l'alimentation* 9(2), 1-30. <https://doi.org/10.15353/cfs-rcea.v9i2.598>
- Rosset, P. (2006). *Food is different: Why we must get the WTO out of agriculture*. Fernwood Publishing.
- Sachs, C., Allen, P., Terman, A. R., Hayden, J., & Hatcher, C. (2014). Front and back of the house: Socio-spatial inequalities in food work. *Agriculture and Human Values*, 31(1), 3–17. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10460-013-9445-7>
- Sbicca, J. (2015). Food labor, economic inequality, and the imperfect politics of process in the alternative food movement. *Agriculture and Human Values*, 32(4), 675–687. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10460-015-9582-2>
- Seufert, V., & Ramankutty, N. (2017). Many shades of gray—The context-dependent performance of organic agriculture. *Science Advances*, 3(e1602638). <https://doi.org/10.1126/sciadv.1602638>
- Seufert, V., Ramankutty, N., & Mayerhofer, T. (2017). What is this thing called organic? – How organic farming is codified in regulations. *Food Policy*, 68, 10–20. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.foodpol.2016.12.009>
- Sligh, M., & Cierpka, T. (2007). Organic Values. In W. Lockeretz (Ed.), *Organic Farming: An International History*. CABI.
- Soper, R. (2019). How wage structure and crop size negatively impact farmworker livelihoods in monocrop organic production: Interviews with strawberry harvesters in California. *Agriculture and Human Values*, 37, 325–336. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10460-019-09989-0>
- Soper, R. (2021). Workplace preference among farmworkers: Piece rate, pesticides, and the perspective of fruit and vegetable harvesters. *Rural Sociology*, 86(4), 728-751. <https://doi.org/10.1111/ruso.12377>
- Sowerwine, J., Getz, C., & Peluso, N. (2015). The myth of the protected worker: Southeast Asian micro-farmers in California agriculture. *Agriculture and Human Values*, 32(4), 579–595. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10460-014-9578-3>
- Statistics Canada. (2016). *Selected variables classified by organic farm status, 2016 Census of Agriculture*.

- Timmermann, C., & Félix, G. F. (2015). Agroecology as a vehicle for contributive justice. *Agriculture and Human Values*, 32, 523-538. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10460-014-9581-8>
- United Food and Commercial Workers Union Canada (UFCW) Canada, & Agriculture Workers Alliance. (2015). *The status of migrant farm workers in Canada*. <http://www.migrantworkersrights.net/fr/resources/the-status-of-migrant-farm-workers-in-canada-2015-u>
- United States Department of Agriculture (USDA). (2018). *Elemental sulfur technical report*. United States Department of Agriculture Agricultural Marketing Service. <https://www.ams.usda.gov/sites/default/files/media/ElementalSulfurCropsTechnicalReport2018.pdf>
- Villarejo, D., & Baron, S. (1999). The occupational health status of hired farm workers. *Occupational Medicine (Philadelphia, Pa.)*, 14(3), 613—635.
- Vosko, L. F. (2018). Legal but deportable: Institutionalized deportability and the limits of collective bargaining among participants in Canada’s seasonal agricultural workers program. *ILR Review*, 71(4), 882–907. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0019793918756055>
- Weiler, A., Levkoe, C., & Young, C. (2016a). Cultivating equitable ground: Community-based participatory research to connect food movements with migrant farmworkers. *Journal of Agriculture, Food Systems, and Community Development*, 6(2), 73-87. <https://doi.org/10.5304/jafscd.2016.062.012>
- Weiler, A., Otero, G., & Wittman, H. (2016b). Rock stars and bad apples: Moral economies of alternative food networks and precarious farm work regimes. *Antipode*, 48 (4), 1140–1162. <https://doi.org/10.1111/anti.12221>
- Weiler, A., McLaughlin, J., Caxaj, S., & Cole, D. (2020, April 1). *Protecting the health and rights of migrant agricultural workers during the COVID-19 outbreak should be a priority*. Policy Note. <https://www.policynote.ca/migrant-workers/>
- Weiler, A., & Fairey, D. (2021, May 28). *Minimum wage rules should apply across the board*. Vancouver Sun. <https://vancouversun.com/opinion/op-ed/anelyse-weiler-and-david-fairey-minimum-wage-rules-should-apply-across-the-board>
- Weiler, A. M., & Encalada Grez, E. (2022). Rotten asparagus and just-in-time workers: Canadian agricultural industry framing of farm labour and food security during the COVID-19 pandemic. *Canadian Food Studies / La Revue Canadienne des études sur l'alimentation* 9(2), 38-52. <https://doi.org/10.15353/cfs-rcea.v9i2.521>
- Willer, E. H., Schlatter, B., Trávní, J., Kemper, L., & Lernoud, J. (Eds.). (2020). *The World of Organic Agriculture Statistics and Emerging Trends 2020*. Research Institute of Organic Agriculture FiBL & IFOAM Organics International.

<https://orgprints.org/id/eprint/37222/9/willer-et-al-2020-full-document-2020-02-28-4th-corrigenda.pdf>

- Wilson, A., & Levkoe, C. Z. (2022). Introspecting food movements in Canada: Unpacking tensions towards justice and sustainability. *Canadian Food Studies / La Revue Canadienne Des Études Sur l'alimentation* 9(2), 101-124. <https://doi.org/10.15353/cfs-rcea.v9i2.524>
- Woodward, P. (2019a, May 17). *Billionaire Aquilini family shortchanged migrant workers, B.C. government rules*. CBC. <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/british-columbia/billionaire-aquilini-family-shortchanged-migrant-workers-b-c-government-rules-1.5138952>
- Woodward, P. (2019b, May 29). *Guatemalan workers allege poor conditions at Aquilini berry farm*. CBC News. <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/british-columbia/aquilini-farm-workers-allege-poor-conditions-1.5152875>
- Wright, E. O. (2010). *Envisioning Real Utopias*. Verso.



Original Research Article

Food activism and negotiating the gendered dynamics of public cultures of careTeresa Lloro^{a*} and Frecia González^b^a Cal Poly Pomona University^b Institute for Public Strategies

Abstract

A growing and significant research literature utilizes feminist frameworks to study relationships with food from a variety of vantage points. In this article, we are especially interested in feminist food sovereignty, feminist political ecology, and feminist theories of care, both because caring labor has been historically undervalued in food systems and because neoliberal modes of commodification and marketization have interpellated activists, scholar-activists, and activist-scholars into new ways of self-care and caring for others. To begin, we provide a brief overview of the places where we work, including the city of Pomona, the Pomona Valley Certified Farmers Market, and the Pomona Community Farmer Alliance (PCFA), a community organization and local activist collective. We then draw on nearly three years of participatory ethnographic work in this community to explore and theorize care work in local food systems activism. Our conceptual framework, framed by feminist food studies and theories of care, illuminates how PCFA members conceive of their own caring work in practice, as well as how they negotiate the complexities of caring for others and self, while being left by the state to do this work. We also explore how activists' care practices sometimes lay bare structural inequalities and the failure of the state, while also reinforcing and challenging neoliberal ideologies embedded in volunteerism. To conclude, we discuss the gendered implications of our work for food systems research, specifically considering the complementarity of Progressive and Radical approaches to food systems transformation.

*Corresponding author: tllorbidart@cpp.edu

DOI: 10.15353/cfs-rcea.v9i1.537

ISSN: 2292-3071

Keywords: Activism; care; gender; intersectional feminism; feminist food studies; progressive and radical food movement

Introduction

Pomona, California (U.S.) is a vibrant, multicultural city of approximately 150,000 that sits on the very eastern edge of Los Angeles County. Incorporated in 1888, after settlers forcibly removed the Indigenous Tongva peoples who had inhabited the area for millennia, Pomona quickly became a booming agricultural hub leading the industry in citrus production. Like many locales in Southern California responding to population increases, Pomona shed its early agricultural beginnings, fully establishing itself as a bustling suburb of Los Angeles. Yet in comparison to all of the cities that flank its immediate boundaries, Pomona has notably higher rates of poverty, and housing and food insecurity, and scores more poorly on environmental justice and health indicators (Los Angeles County Department of Public Health, 2018).¹ Perhaps because of these failings, Pomona has become a hub for grassroots food justice activism, urban agriculture, and pop-up food-based street vendors, with multiple activist, community, and non-profit organizations offering a variety of services and support.

This article focusses primarily on the work of the grassroots community organization, the Pomona Community Farmer Alliance (PCFA), which three women² formed in 2018 in response to what they perceived as profound structural inequalities impacting Pomona's predominantly low-income and Latinx population. Though PCFA founders recognized that inequitable systems affect access to employment, medical care, housing, and other resources, they chose to focus on building a safe community space in the form of a farmers market, while increasing the community's access to fresh, chemical-free food. The focus on food was chosen partly because residents disproportionately experience a high toxic waste burden in comparison to surrounding locales³ and because co-founder, Elena, strongly believes that increasing access to chemical-free food⁴ is an obtainable and tangible mechanism for improving health.⁵ Further, since these women collectively have a strong background in public health, nutrition, urban farming, and community organizing, their skills matched well with this kind of project.

¹ Indeed in 2018, the prevalence of food insecurity among households with incomes below 300 percent of the federal poverty level was 20 percent and the city ranked in the 0th percentile on the California Healthy Profiles Index Clean Environment Score (Los Angeles County Department of Public Health, 2018).

² One founder identifies as a woman; another as a queer, non-binary woman; and another as a bisexual woman.

³ "Chemical-free" in this context refers to food produced without the use of added fertilizers or pesticides, even those the USDA deems compatible with certified organic farming.

⁴ Pomona's class and racial dynamics have changed markedly over time, with White flight and structurally racist policies having a profound impact on quality of life. See Carpio (2019).

⁵ Future investigations will further explore how activists conceptualize notions of healthy living in the context of the work they do.

Rather than starting an entirely new farmers market, they collaborated with the fiscal sponsor (Inland Valley Hope Partners) and market manager of the forty-year-old Pomona Valley Certified Farmers Market to develop an entirely volunteer-run section of the existing market. One of the main goals of this new market model is to provide the community with fresh, local, chemical-free food at a greatly reduced cost while explicitly supporting local, chemical-free, regenerative farmers, especially those who hail from traditionally marginalized groups (e.g., women, queer, Latinx, Black, Asian American, and Pacific Islanders). Essentially, the PCFA accomplishes this goal by serving as an alternative distribution network (e.g., White, 2019), generating a kind of subsidy that benefits farmers/producers and the local community alike. Their work supports farmers by (1) reducing or eliminating travel expenses since producers do not have to come to the farmers market (PCFA members pick up the food at local farms or other farmers markets); (2) eliminating labour costs associated with the market since a PCFA volunteer sells the farmer's/producer's goods at the market; and (3) eliminating farmers' "losses" at the end of the market, which not only reduce revenue, but also contribute to food waste (Pomona Community Farmer Alliance, 2019).⁶ Since the launching of the PCFA-run farmers market in June 2018, the PCFA has expanded its work to include a variety of other programs, including operating a free community seed exchange and a food security program that delivers fresh produce, meats, and grains (free of charge) to families impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic.⁷

Currently, the PCFA functions with a core membership group of six to eight people (mostly women) and a cadre of volunteer activists from diverse age, class, ethnic, racial, and sexuality backgrounds. Two of the three original core team members remain, with one being highly active on-the-ground at the market since the inception of the PCFA (Elena) and the other, Alicia, contributing in an administrative capacity through her work at a local health-based non-profit. Many core team members and volunteer activists are highly educated and were first-generation college students, though there are exceptions. For example, shortly after the inception of the pandemic, high school students joined the PCFA as a way of having social interactions, since they could no longer go to school. The core team is distinguished from regular volunteer activists primarily through their collective decision making at monthly meetings, consistent participation at the market, and coordination of food pickups and drop offs.

PCFA leadership has actively resisted developing a mission statement, and has also maintained a horizontal leadership structure where the core team collectively makes decisions in order to subvert what some members call the "non-profit-industrial complex." The PCFA itself is

⁶ Most farmers with perishable items like produce incur losses at the end of farmers markets. The PCFA eliminates farmer losses by creating food baskets with excess produce and by working with another organization, Food Cycle Collective, to cook meals for people living in the streets. All food that is not consumable is composted at local farms and gardens.

⁷ The free community seed exchange is funded by grants Teresa and a colleague received from the California Humanities and Teresa's home institution. The site is also a seed distribution hub for the Cooperative Gardens Commission, which has provided a large quantity of seed donations. See Lloro (2021) for more on the PCFA and its work in the community.

not a non-profit corporation, but rather operates as a program within a parent non-profit, allowing activists flexibility in terms of how to conceive of and enact their work. Thus, the group is instead methods and goal-driven,⁸ which founder, Elena, contrasts with a mission or purpose statement required to register a nonprofit corporation. She comments, “Values and vision are defined to guide action. And the action is defined by the what (goals) and the (how) methods, rather than one linear mission...by defining goals and methods, we can better address the complexity of transformation in a way that invites creativity from people who might be participating” (Elena, personal communication, July 12, 2021).

Although like any organization there is a diversity of sometimes conflicting perspectives and viewpoints, ideologically, core members are united in their scathing critiques of neoliberal capitalism; commitment to generating access to chemical-free food, regardless of income; and in their desire to build a safe and welcoming community space in a city deeply impacted by high violent crime rates, homelessness, and the legacies of structural classism and racism (Los Angeles County Department of Public Health, 2018).

In this research project our aim was to understand how the activist collective, Pomona Community Farmer Alliance, brings low-cost organic/chemical-free food to the Pomona Valley Certified Farmers Market. We thus explored the following questions:

- What are the barriers and tensions associated with doing this work?

In what ways does this work simultaneously challenge and reinforce neoliberal logics interpenetrating food systems?

Conceptual framework

Several distinct, yet related traditions in feminism influence this study, including feminist food sovereignty, feminist political ecology, and feminist theories of care. Although we cannot exhaustively review each, below we provide a brief overview of the perspectives that inform our work. Additionally, we describe Holt Giménez and Shattuck’s (2011) four trends in corporate food regimes and global food movements (Neoliberal, Reformist, Progressive, Radical)⁹ as a way of framing the last part of our analysis that examines the PCFA’s potential to enact change at the structural level. There, we also draw out the gendered implications of the future of the PCFA’s work, especially as they relate to caring labor and food systems change.

Feminist Traditions

Austerity policies in the United States (U.S.) deeply imbricated with neoliberal ideologies have simultaneously gutted most social safety nets while concomitantly permitting corporations to abdicate responsibility for providing a living wage (Fisher, 2017; Kurtz et al.,

⁸ See PomonaCFA.org for more on the PCFA’s goals and work.

⁹ Consistent with Holt-Giménez and Shattuck (2011), we capitalized the letters of the corporate food regimes and global food movements when referring specifically to the movements. When discussing these concepts more generally, we refrain from capitalization.

2019).¹⁰ As Dickinson (2019) recently highlights in her work on the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) in the U.S.,¹¹ the food social safety net has actually expanded and become increasingly tied to work requirements. In effect, this excludes vulnerable people (e.g., undocumented workers and the unemployed) from receiving assistance, while subsidizing low wage employment. The emergency food system has ballooned in response to these changes, placing the responsibility of “feeding America” on charitable organizations, many of which depend on women’s paid and unpaid labour, are ill-equipped to provide structural solutions to food insecurity, as well as predominantly rely on low quality food (highly processed, nutrient poor, calorie dense) donated by the very corporations that have helped to create the working poor in the U.S. (Dickinson, 2019; Fisher, 2017).

In tracing the concomitant rise of volunteerism and neoliberalism in the U.S., Hyatt (2001) contends that public discourses related to service and volunteerism have not only pathologized the poor, but “served to reconfigure the relationship between the entire citizenry and the state” (p. 203). While her writings are now two decades old, they still resonate with contemporary governance in the U.S. as neoliberal ideologies interpenetrate nearly all aspects of cultural, economic, and social life (e.g., Warf, 2021), forcing individuals to pick up where the shrinking state has left off. Hyatt (2001) also purports that, “the current emphasis on volunteerism as a necessarily and laudable public virtue has served to mask poverty as a site of social and material inequality and *to obscure the role that state action continues to play in reproducing such inequalities*” (p. 206; original emphasis). Although we agree and strongly align ourselves with similar critiques emerging from food justice and food sovereignty movements (e.g., Clendenning et al., 2015; Edelman et al., 2014), we complicate this argument here by demonstrating how activists’ care practices sometimes lay bare structural inequalities and the failure of the state, while also subverting some of the systems that cause structural inequalities in the first place. Our conceptual framework for analyzing and theorizing care work thus centres on distilling the gendered ways PCFA activists conceive of their own caring work in practice, as well as how they negotiate the complexities of caring for others and self, while being left by the state to do this work.

As Hankivsky (2014) highlights, care ethics can be divided into “two generations,” with the first focussing on women’s morality (e.g., Gilligan, 1982) and the second on care being both a moral and political concept (e.g., Tronto, 1993). In the latter view, which we embrace in this article, care is a “species activity that includes everything that we do to maintain, continue, and repair our ‘world’ so that we can live in it as well as possible. That world includes our bodies, our environments, all of which we seek to interweave in a complex, life-sustaining web.” (Tronto, 1993, p. 103).

¹⁰ See Tung et al., 2022, this issue for a similar discussion in the Canadian context.

¹¹ In 1964, US Congress, with the support of President Lyndon Johnson, passed the Food Stamp Act. It has since gone through many permutations. The title officially became the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program with the passage of the Food and Nutrition Act of 2008 (United State Department of Agriculture, 2018).

Although Tronto's (1993) definition of care implies that the "environment" is included in humans' sphere of caring, ecofeminist (or ecological feminist) (e.g., Donovan & Adams, 2007) and new materialist feminist care theorists (e.g., Puig de la Bellacasa, 2017) have further developed these ideas since the 1990s, theorizing the complexities of caring for nonhuman living beings, as well as the nonliving material world. For all of these theorists, affect, emotion, and relationality are central to understanding how care is enacted in practice in gendered ways and within very specific sociopolitical contexts shaped by structural gender expectations and norms.

Self-care is perhaps more contested, as Foucault highlighted in his later works (Fornet-Betancourt et al., 1987). In a 1984 interview conducted shortly before his death, Foucault traces how self-care persisted during the times of the Greeks and the Romans, partly because of the emphasis on the relationship between knowing oneself and the practice of freedom. However, with the rise of Christianity, he notes that self-care became problematic because "In Christianity salvation is also caring for self. But in Christianity salvation is obtained by renunciation of self" (Fornet-Betancourt et al., 1987, p. 116). The idea that self-care is simultaneously indulgent but paradoxically necessary pervades contemporary neoliberal feminisms, which seek to interpellate women into "Accept[ing] full responsibility for [their] own wellbeing and self-care, which is increasingly predicated on crafting a felicitous work-family balance based on cost-benefit calculus" (Rottenberg, 2014, p. 420). In these formulations of self-care, the individual woman is a fully autonomous agent with the capacity, and indeed obligation, to simultaneously care for others and for self.

Intersectional feminists like Ahmed (2014) and Lorde (2017), in contrast, challenge the neoliberal co-opting of care, contending that self-care is (or should be) life-sustaining, particularly for women of colour and other vulnerable people. Their theories of self-care are inherently relational, as they emphasize the creation of community. Ahmed notes, "Self-care: that can be an act of political warfare. In directing our care towards ourselves we are redirecting care away from its proper objects, we are not caring for those we are supposed to care for; we are not caring for the bodies deemed worth caring about. And that is why in queer, feminist, and anti-racist work self-care is about the creation of community, fragile communities, assembled out of the experiences of being shattered. We reassemble ourselves through the ordinary, everyday, and often painstaking work of looking after ourselves; looking after each other" (2014, para. 39). Since research demonstrates how women typically bear a greater emotional burden than men in activist work (e.g., Kennelly, 2014), in this article we explore the gendered and sometimes relational ways PCFA activists conceive of self-care in practice.

Trends in corporate food regimes and food systems change

Holt-Giménez and Shattuck (2011) draw on work in food regime analysis (Friedmann, 1987; Friedmann & McMichael, 1989; McMichael, 2007) and Karl Polanyi's (1944) double-movement thesis on capitalism to explain contemporary relations between food production and

consumption. Since the 1980s, they contend that a powerful corporate food regime has dominated the world, which is “characterized by the unprecedented market power and profits of monopoly agrifood corporations, globalized animal protein chains, liberalized global trade in food, increasingly concentrated land-ownership, a shrinking natural resource base, and growing opposition from food movements worldwide” (Holt-Giménez & Shattuck, 2011, p. 111).

Holt-Giménez and Shattuck (2011) characterize trends within the corporate food regime as either Neoliberal or Reformist and those within food organizations and movements (that tend to oppose the corporate food regime) as either Progressive or Radical. The Neoliberal trend is corporate-driven, embraces economic liberalism and free market fundamentalism, and focusses on the expansion of global markets and technological solutions. The United States Department of Agriculture and the International Monetary Fund are two examples. The Reformist trend is similar to the Neoliberal trend in its approach, but it also embraces a cautious food security discourse, renewed public financing for agricultural development, state-sponsored safety nets, and certification systems like Fair Trade. Major institutions and organizations embedded in the Reformist trend include the Food and Agriculture Organization and Feeding America.

The Progressive trend in food movements is rooted in food justice discourses that emphasize empowerment of the poor, critiques of structural racism, local food, family farming, healthy food, and direct linkages in the food chain between rural and urban stakeholders (e.g., farmers markets), as well the prevalence of urban agriculture to establish local, community-based food systems. Exemplar institutions and organizations include community supported agriculture (CSAs), Alternative Fair Trade, and the Coalition of Immokalee Workers. Finally, the Radical trend is distinguished from the Progressive trend for its emphasis on “dismantling corporate agrifoods monopolies, parity, redistributive land reform, protection from dumping and overproduction, and community rights to water and seed” (Holt-Giménez & Shattuck, 2011, pp. 128-129). Institutions/movements in the Radical trend, such as La Via Campesina and the World March for Women also view the sovereign power of the state (versus capitalist markets) as a site of redistributive land reform and provider of social protections and safety nets.

Research Design

Methods

Participant-observation

Participant-observation, one of the primary tools of ethnographic research, involves immersion in the site being studied while writing jottings and later expanded fieldnotes that serve as a primary data source (e.g., Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007). By becoming volunteers with the PCFA at the Pomona Farmers Market, as well as purchasing our own food from the market, we have been able to build relationships with a variety of research participants. We have also gained

familiarity with many facets of running the PCFA and the farmers market. Finally, we have attended City Council meetings, stakeholder meetings with city government officials, community organizing meetings, and other gatherings where important decisions about the PCFA and farmers market are made, contributing to these decisions in various capacities when needed.

Ethnographic interviewing

In ethnographic interviews, we focussed on eliciting what is important to study participants in relation to the study objectives, while also avoiding leading questions as much as possible. Interviews followed a semi-structured format, allowing for new questions, points of interest, and thoughts to emerge during the interview process (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007). We crafted interview questions using previously published interview protocols (e.g., McCullen, 2008), our theoretical framework, and our early fieldwork experiences at the sites as a guide. Interview questions focussed on activists' roles and involvement with the PCFA, including their motivations for participation, challenges, or barriers to participation, as well as how the PCFA has met (or failed to meet) their needs and those of the community. Further, we inquired about how their participation impacted their social connections or networks, as well as how they thought the farmers market could better meet community needs (e.g., Julier, 2019; Steager, 2013). We also relied considerably on emergent questions during the actual interview process that responded to each research participant's unique experiences with the PCFA.

We conducted most interviews in an informal setting of the participant's choosing, and several interviews occurred via Zoom due to Covid-19. A total of twelve PCFA core team members and activists were interviewed, with one interview including three research participants, per their request. Eight of the thirteen interviewees were part of the core team, four were activist-volunteers, and one a PCFA-supported farmer. Nine participants were women, three were men, and one was non-binary. Since activist participation in the PCFA is in constant flux, these gender ratios do not necessarily represent the larger activist pool. Teresa (article co-author) approached activists with interview requests based on their length of involvement with the PCFA (at least two months), both so that participants had familiarity with the organization and so that she had time to build rapport with them. In many cases, Teresa spent months volunteering alongside research participants before conducting interviews. We audio recorded interviews that Teresa's undergraduate students and a community volunteer then transcribed. Teresa interviewed the majority of research participants (eleven), with her undergraduate student researchers conducting two interviews. All interviewees are referred to using pseudonyms to maintain confidentiality.

Data analysis

We reviewed all transcripts through several iterations in an effort to identify themes that surfaced during the interviews. Teresa, Frecia (article co-author), and Teresa's three undergraduate

student researchers collectively created a codebook to document identified themes, descriptions of themes, and direct quotes as examples exploring themes. We met to review several iterations of revisions until we agreed on code definitions and examples. Our initial codes emerged from the research literature and our conceptual framework, and we augmented the codebook based on codes emerging from our data. We started with approximately seventy codes and subcodes. Codes were words or phrases like, “access,” and subcodes included more specificity like “access to fresh food” or “access to fruits and vegetables” or “access defined by affordability.” During analysis, Teresa and Frecia added approximately twenty codes emerging from the data, which included words like “values,” “communication,” “Covid-19 accommodations,” and “giving back.” Since our research project is rooted in feminist ethnographic traditions, we focussed primarily on descriptive, emotion, and values coding to assist us in describing how participants view the role of care in their work with the PCFA (Saldaña, 2013). We then compiled participants’ responses, allowing us to distill common themes, as well as patterns in the data. In the following section, “Enactments of Care,” we present six major themes that coalesce around care for others and self-care within the PCFA.

Results: Enactments of care

Care for others

Within the first few months of her work with the PCFA, Teresa noticed public care work being performed mostly by women activists. The prevalence of women in urban agriculture contexts has been observed in prior research (Allen & Sachs, 2007; Martin, 2019; Trauger et al., 2017), despite the fact that women continue to be marginalized in farming more generally (Collins, 2018; Trevilla-Espinal et al., 2021; Portman, 2018; Shisler & Sbicca, 2019). We suggest here that the chronic failure of neoliberal capitalism to bring chemical-free, fresh, and healthy foods to low-income neighborhoods (Agyeman & McEntee, 2014) has resulted in the interpellation of a new, public form of food procurement that relies largely on gendered subjects to perform the majority of its unpaid work. Although in the western, North American context food provisioning is conceptualized more typically as provisioning for oneself or one’s family (Meierotto & Castellano, 2019), PCFA activists often refer to the community or the market as an extension of their family. Indeed, in many ways the organization uses strategies of the food cooperative model (e.g., Figueroa & Alkon, 2017; Moon, 2021; White 2019) through its establishment of complex, hyperlocal, and alternative food distribution networks that in some cases subvert neoliberal capitalism. For example, at the farmers market activists vend a variety of chemical-free foods (e.g., almonds, beans, grains, fresh produce, meats, olive oil) that would not normally be available in the city of Pomona. Due to the PCFA model that suppresses costs for farmers, these foods are offered at subsidized prices, making them more affordable for low-income residents.

Care as community access to chemical-free, fresh, healthy food

Many activists volunteer with the PCFA to provide the community with greater access to fresh, local, chemical-free food, as both Ana Maria and Nash articulate in their interviews. Ana Maria, a late twenties college educated Latina immigrant and founder of a community and urban gardening-based nonprofit that promotes food sovereignty, sometimes sells her produce at the farmers market, and has also served as a core team member and manager of the community seed exchange. She strongly identifies the community she serves as “low-income people of color,” (PoC) stressing that her non-profit is also PoC run, “I strongly believe that access to healthy local food is a right and not a privilege, so I want to make it accessible to everyone because not everyone can afford to go to Whole Foods or Sprouts all the time and get the best produce, but we have plenty of land, especially here in Pomona, where we can make it happen.... From my perspective, the role of the market is to provide the residents of Pomona with fresh and chemical-free produce.”

Even though Ana Maria does not use the word “care” in her interview, an ethos of care that directly challenges the neoliberal capitalist emphasis on markets is exemplified in how she describes the inaccessibility of high-end chains like Whole Foods and Sprouts. For Ana Maria, “hyperlocal” food networks, like her own non-profit, are a critical means for low-income PoC to “get the best produce” and experience “personal, social, and environmental health in our communities” (Growing Roots, 2017).¹²

Nash, a college educated White man in his late twenties, who at the time of his interview had only volunteered with the PCFA for two months, has now volunteered nearly two years, serving as a core team member for the last year. He currently participates by procuring food at other markets and farms, assisting with the PCFA’s food security program by planting and harvesting at a new local community farm, and by helping run the market most of the day Saturday. For Nash, care for the community is rooted in his belief that everyone, regardless of income, should have access to what he describes as “clean and healthy food” that prevents disease. In this excerpt, he specifically identifies women and children as part of the community he hopes to serve,

We're trying to give our local community, which is for the most part a low-income community, access to clean and healthy food...that doesn't have chemicals on it...to help fight things like cancer and other elements. We get exposed to a lot of foods that have things on them, that literally alter our DNA, like free radicals. As far as we know, if you have food that is grown without pesticides and is not transported very far distances, so you don't have to spray things on it to keep it safe, then it's clean right? We have the program [WIC] here, so we give incentives for the women

¹² As this excerpt and others throughout the manuscript illustrate, race also emerged as important in our data. However, we have insufficient space in this manuscript to give it the full attention it deserves.

and children program to spend their money here, and hopefully it's cleaner and safer for food [for them].¹³

Given that prior research demonstrates how women take primary responsibility for protecting their children from toxin exposure, sometimes at great expense (e.g., Kimura, 2016), Nash's assumption that WIC is an important part of the farmers market for this population points to the gendered nature of food procurement. This excerpt also demonstrates that Nash is concerned with the kinds of foods that women and children have available to them as he recognizes their greater level of vulnerability in the food system.

Care as building, growing, and supporting the community

To varying degrees, all activists we interviewed invoked the language of building, growing, or supporting community as central to their volunteerism. Jolie, a late twenties, gender non-conforming, and college educated Latina immigrant, has worn many hats in the organization. She frequently uses her ability to speak Spanish as a way to connect with vulnerable people, like non-English speaking and low-income elders. As a core team member, Jolie has maintained social media accounts, taken a leadership role harvesting produce at a local farm for food security baskets, as well as regularly volunteered the day of the farmers market to assist with set up, running booths, and managing finances. She passionately describes her various roles with the PCFA, conceptualizing the community she cares for as inclusive of activists and elders, “That connection between volunteers and the farm or at the farm [who harvest produce for food security baskets], I feel I help with that too. Seeing them later, checking on them like, ‘How do you feel? How was your experience with it?’ [is important to me]. And [I] address if they have concerns...so taking care of the volunteers in some way.”

Jolie goes on later in the interview, “So, when Covid happened—they [elders] are the most vulnerable for Covid. They are afraid; they are alone; and they were running out of food, so they got in contact with us. Someone gave them our number, and I would take the Spanish calls. So, I've supported the initiative [that way]. I've taken those Spanish calls and they were emotionally intense. So, I think I also supported the initiative by connecting with those folks.”

In Jolie's interview, her face welled up with emotion every time she discussed caring for the community—however she might define it and however that care might be actualized in practice. In the first excerpt, the community is inclusive of activists assisting with harvesting. In the second, community also includes all of the elders who have become part of the PCFA's outreach efforts. Due to her bilingualism and the vulnerability of the Spanish-speaking community the PCFA serves, Jolie has been encumbered with a greater caring burden than many

¹³ WIC refers to “The Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children,” which the US federal government uses to ensure low-income pregnant, breastfeeding, and non-breastfeeding women, as well as infants and children up to age five, have adequate nutrition and health care (United States Department of Agriculture, n.d.).

other activists because she is able to connect to this isolated population, many of whom had recently lost family members, employment, or both, and lacked access to basic necessities like food and medical care due to structural inequalities the Covid-19 pandemic exacerbated considerably (e.g., Montenegro de Wit, 2021).

Although Cooper, a gender non-conforming, college educated White individual in their late twenties, does not refer to intense emotional labor in the way that Jolie does, they similarly refer to care as it relates to their role in building community. Their participation at the market waxes and wanes due to school and work responsibilities, but they generally volunteer several Saturdays a month. Cooper is also an active member of a PCFA sister organization (Food Cycle Collective) that rides bicycles throughout the city every Sunday to deliver meals to the “neighbors in our streets,” a phrase that activists use to replace the term “homeless.” Meal preparation begins at the farmers market, where activists chop up edible, but discarded fruits and vegetables at the farmers market in an effort to reduce food waste and prepare meals. In the excerpt below, they contrast their role there with the dominant American ethos of individualism and caring only for oneself,

Well, my actual favorite part is the fact that now I've been coming here for so long, I know all these people. I can stop at any stall and be like "Eh yo wassup!" So, it's actually like creating a community, and you know, all those people like, "I'm so proud and 'Merica!" And it's just like, but, you only take care of yourself. What about the rest of America?... I know I see these people only once a week, and I only see them at the farmers market, like we never hung out...but it's still a community here, and we all see each other.

Alluding to supporters of former President Trump, who have been seen at protests, rallies, and the storming of the U.S. Capitol expressing pride for “‘Merica” and the American ethos of rugged individualism, Cooper conveys here that the PCFA and the farmers market are building a kind of community that centres care for others.

Care as “showing up for my friends”

Central to community-building within the PCFA and at the farmers market is the forging of relationships and bonds with fellow activists. Thus some study participants, like Jolie and Ned, explicitly express a kind of care for others rooted in expressing their solidarity with friends. In this excerpt, Jolie describes how she came to be an activist at the farmers market, “I remember a couple of times that I just showed up to get my veggies [as a shopper and not yet as a volunteer] and I heard Elena and she was stressed, and I remember thinking, ‘Okay I’m just going to show up for my friend.’ And I stayed for hours and then I was just doing more and more and... I think at that point it was, ‘I’m showing up for my friend.’”

Thus, Jolie was initially inspired to join the PCFA to help out a friend, Elena, not because of concerns with community food access. However, she became deeply concerned about food security shortly after deeper engagement with the PCFA. While the PCFA has no official

“leader,” many refer to Elena in this way because she takes on an unofficial and unpaid leadership role and is usually responsible for ensuring all of the booths at the market have coverage on Saturday mornings.

Similarly, Ned, an early thirties college educated man of Middle Eastern descent describes volunteering at the market as a “group effort,” “So, I love the idea that I’m helping to provide my community with fresh produce each week, fresh products not just produce. I mean my motivation has also changed. I’ve gotten to know people at the market; this is also a group effort. This is something I do with my friends now, like we all help to provide Pomona with these services.”

Although Jolie found herself volunteering out of a strong sense of obligation to help a friend, which later grew into a deep passion for food sovereignty work, Ned was initially more interested in the community food sovereignty aspects of the PCFA and found himself embedded in a “group effort” with friends. Further, he specifically refers to providing “services” to the community in a recognition that capitalist markets and the state do not ensure that low-income communities have adequate access to healthy food.

Self-care

In addition to expressing care for others, many activists also shared how they engage in forms of self-care. For some women in particular, physically being at the farmers market or doing farmers market-affiliated activities with others constitutes a form of self-care, both because they can obtain the highest quality food possible to nourish their bodies and because they form and maintain important bonds and connections with others, especially during a time of heightened social isolation brought on by the Covid-19 pandemic. As the excerpts below explicate, caring for others and self-care are not necessarily mutually exclusive and self-care is sometimes conceptualized relationally, which we will discuss in more detail in the Discussion section of this article.

Self-care as ensuring access to chemical-free, fresh, healthy food

Some activists drawn to the farmers market described themselves as eating healthily and sustainably prior to their work with the PCFA. They thus describe feeling a sense of belonging or community in a space that shared their same values. Others, in contrast, discuss how being at the market actually constituted a form of self-care that gave them access to a greater variety of fresh, local, chemical-free food and/or a community supportive of queer, non-binary, and non-traditional gender roles.

In their interview, Cooper (now a vegan) describes their family food history from the perspective of growing up lower-middle class and having a mother who placed greater importance on material goods than high quality foods. They sometimes did not have food and

when they did, it primarily consisted of refined carbohydrates, meat, and frozen or canned vegetables. They describe how the farmers market and its affiliated farms and programs have expanded their knowledge of plants, as well as changed their eating habits, “For one it expands the variety of [food] that I eat. I’m not a particularly creative cook. You know, I make some good dishes, but I generally just make the same stuff over and over again. But coming here, I see this red celery looking thing? Oh yeah that’s chard. You can make this with this. It’s like, oh, I thought chard was short for charcoal!”

While Cooper self-describes as someone already committed to the sustainability aspects of the farmers market like its zero-waste initiative, for them the opportunity to participate in the actual growing and harvesting of food at a local farm indelibly changed their food practices for the better.

Like Cooper, Ned also identifies as someone who cared about sustainability prior to coming to the market as an attendee and eventually an activist. Before stumbling upon the market, he was struggling to find the kinds of food that he wanted to eat at a price he could afford,

So as a student who doesn’t have a lot of money.... I don’t have family in the area.... I tried to eat healthy. Like on campus what were my options to eat? Carl’s Jr., Panda Express, the little snack shops that have like \$5 granola bars? There were two types of grocery stores that I could access within fifteen minutes of my house, and the products were very limited and I felt overpriced for organic.... So, it was just like I didn’t have access to the produce, which is a huge part of my diet. And I felt, like particularly for the community that could be served or needs to be served in my area, there really were just limited options for things for me to eat. We just had fast food, and that’s just not the way that I sustain my body and my health.

Having recently arrived in California to attend graduate school, Ned navigated unfamiliar terrain and was frustrated with the preponderance of fast and processed foods that he found in the area. Unable to care for his body in the way that he was accustomed, as well as the way that he believes community members around him should be able to care for their bodies, Ned describes finding the food that he needed at the farmers market.

Self-Care as finding a place to form important bonds and connections

Many research participants, as well as people we have encountered in our everyday volunteering at the market, enthusiastically characterize the farmers market as a place where they have made critically significant bonds and connections with people who share similar values. Although traditional western and contemporary neoliberal theories of self-care conceptualize the individual as an autonomous agent and self-care practices as those which occur within or for the self, relational theories of care challenge this reductionist approach. As Ahmed emphasizes, self-care

rooted in “queer, feminist, and anti-racist work” is deeply connected the creation of community, “assembled out of the experiences of being shattered” (2014, para 39). Below, Jolie, a Latina, gender non-conforming immigrant woman describes how the PCFA’s acceptance of and support for queer and non-binary identifying members is critical for her, especially because she didn’t find this acceptance in her family or religion, “So, we have teenagers that have shown up, queer teenagers that have just shown up, like high schoolers...many [members] of the core initiative are gender non-conforming, too, non-capitalist conforming, or fighting against that idea.”

She goes on,

Okay, that’s significant for me because...with my upbringing I was raised with three older brothers and I don’t know, like I have never fit with my girlfriends. I don’t like what they like.... Like for me a woman is...strong and independent. Like things that I just don’t associate with what people would associate with like a female. You know? So, and it just feels like I am not a good person. I don’t know. But then just to feel...just to find a place where those rules don’t exist, the rules that I’ve seen in my life, and my family, and my religious background, they...they just...they’re not rules anymore, they’re not signs of goodness, or anything. Like hairy legs and things I like, and that I’m comfortable with...just to find a community that doesn’t have those rules becomes very validating. Like not just a mental...if...if there’s a community that can accept who I am, then I can be who I am and explore who I am instead of feeling all the time that I can’t, that I’m wrong, so that’s why it’s so significant for me.

As Jolie poignantly relates here, being part of the PCFA and its culture of welcoming gender nonconforming and queer people, is a radical act of self-care insofar as it counters the rules and values about gender that profoundly shaped her upbringing. For her, an important part of self-care is relational in that it is tied to finding a group of people with whom she can form a community.

Likewise, Camila, a late twenties, college educated Latina, illuminates the significance of gender in the PCFA as it relates to her own family background and current wellbeing,

I guess being close to people I’m very fond of and learning from people at the market because their lifestyle and ways of doing things are very different than what I grew up with.... Also being around a lot of women. I... I grew up with a lot of male friends. I was raised by my father for a significant amount of time, so I hung around with a lot of boys. And other than my mom and I have sisters, but I never really had a whole lot of positive female relationships in my life. And it’s been really interesting that the market has sort of filled that, I guess gap, in my life. It just...a lot of really strong, opinionated in a positive way not in a negative way, women. Women who are doing this and being out there.

Although Camila does not identify as gender non-conforming or queer, like Jolie she expresses how PCFA culture differs from more traditional gender roles she grew up with. In particular, Camila has found that having positive relationships with strong and independent women is so important that the market is filling a gap in her life that she did not necessarily know was even there.

Self-care as taking a break

Several activists raised the issue of needing to take a break from volunteering as a form of self-care, which a vast body of research has demonstrated is a significant issue in activist work, particularly for activists from marginalized groups (e.g., Kennelly, 2014; Márquez, 2021; Pepin-Neff & Wynter, 2019). One man, Ned, carefully selects his volunteer experiences so that he has adequate time for self-care,

I can't be a part of a volunteer effort where I am constrained or controlled as an individual. I don't feel like that's what volunteering is...when I first started volunteering, you know I didn't realize how much of a commitment I had to make. It was like I started and I felt apprehensive about starting. But then I was reassured by members...that like, "Hey, do not forget that you're a volunteer. You don't have to come next week. Like if you need time to go camping, go camping." So, I don't feel like there is anything that has impeded me from [participating in] the market.

In this excerpt, Ned enumerates how he was initially uncertain about volunteering with the PCFA, especially because of the time commitment. Reassured that he could take breaks when needed, he expresses that he is able to fully participate in the way that is comfortable for his lifestyle.

In contrast to the sense of reassurance that Ned felt, Alicia, a mid-thirties Latina and public health professional, offers another perspective that resonates with the gendered way in which women, and especially women of color, feel guilt for stepping away from activism (e.g., Gorski, 2019; Kennelly, 2014; Márquez, 2021),

I have backtracked some of that time at the market just for personal reasons and self-care, (laugh), but I am heavily invested and still supporting the group. I try to attend as—the planning meetings as much as possible. I, you know, see the email threads. I look for grants, you know.... Yeah, I think there is a certain amount of guilt that goes with actively trying to implement self-care in my life. And it's not just about the farmers market. It's even with family members and friends where, you know, I will, you know, not attend something, or not go to something because I really need that time.

Although Alicia clearly states the need to take a break not just from her activist work, but from obligations to family and friends, her feelings of guilt are manifested in her inability to

completely walk away from the PCFA. Resonating with Ahmed's (2014) and Lorde's (2017) conceptualization of self-care as "self-preservation," particularly for women of color, Alicia recognizes that she needs time to look after herself. However, despite coping with stress from school, work, and her personal life, she continues to provide support to the PCFA in other ways. In the Discussion section that follows, we consider these data in relation to our conceptual framework of care. We highlight how: (1) the failures of the neoliberal state are gendered regarding the care work activists enact and perform; (2) activists' gendered care practices lay bare structural inequalities tied to the failure of the state, subverting some of the very systems that cause structural inequalities in the first place; and (3) activists experience self-care as gendered and relational.

Discussion

Volunteerism, care, and the failure of the state

Hyatt (2001) convincingly demonstrates how the volunteer is a "political subject" who is called to fill state functions (e.g., feed the "deserving" poor) and help communities "heal from within" (pp. 205, 227). In this way, the state has both placed responsibility for ameliorating poverty in the hands of volunteers (mostly women), as well as normalized the withdrawal of public resources from all communities but especially those that are the most impoverished.¹⁴ Our data thus support Hyatt's claim that volunteers are not only political subjects, but that the people responsabilized to do the work of community healing through care work are disproportionately women. From Ana Maria's emphasis on increasing access to chemical-free food because it is a right and privilege for low-income communities, to Jolie's impassioned descriptions of caring for the elderly, volunteers, and friends, it is clear that women activists in the PCFA deeply and emotionally feel the burden of doing this work. Their descriptions of care contrast with Nash's, for example, as he frames caring in the decidedly more rationalist framework of science (e.g., eliminating free radical damage to DNA and fighting cancer).¹⁵

As our involvement with the PCFA grew, we became particularly interested in the gendered ways in which activists' caring labor might (1) lay bare structural inequalities and (2) the state's failure to address these inequalities. Although our data have nudged us in these directions, we suggest that there is much additional research needed. As we have discussed in this section, women in our study tend to feel an impassioned call to do this work and thus take on roles, like Jolie, that involve providing emotional support to others (e.g., non-English speaking, low-income Latinx elders, friends, and other volunteers), along with material resources like food.

¹⁴ Also see Tung et al., 2022, this issue

¹⁵ As feminist philosophers of science have demonstrated (e.g., Collins, 2008; Haraway, 1988; Harding, 1991), positivist science perspectives are often entrenched in patriarchal and capitalist worldviews that marginalize many social groups, including women.

Jolie's caring labor thus makes visible the failure of the state to provide adequate resources to its people on the basis of socioeconomic status and age (as in the case of elders), and emphasizes a dire need elders have to experience connection. In contrasting Jolie's care work with Nash's, it becomes clear that Nash similarly visibilizes some of these structural inequalities and the state's failure to address them. However, he does not necessarily illuminate a structural failure in the U.S. that centres on affectively caring for vulnerable populations (e.g., through the establishment of statewide programs and resources for elders or other marginalized groups that can assist in meeting their material and emotional needs).

To conclude this section, PCFA activists' care work thus sheds much needed light at the local level on multiple structural failures in the food system, though the way in which they enact and conceive of this work has gendered elements. Although they may not all invoke specific terms like the "state" or "neoliberal capitalism," activists, who are predominantly women in number, discursively, emotionally, and materially acknowledge that they do this work because the state, the food system, and/or corporate America has failed their community and they want to build something different. While volunteering at the farmers market, for example, I have heard activists and attendees of all genders in conversation about the impacts of structural racism and poverty on the food system, often vocalizing critiques of neoliberal capitalism, an act in and of itself that enumerates the failure of the state (e.g., Alkon & Guthman, 2017). These kinds of moves contrast with the "do-gooderism" of the alternative food movement and emergency food assistance system, the former of which is aligned with the Progressive trend in food movements and the latter with the Reformist trend in the corporate food regime. Neither tends to critique existing economic or social systems, but rather focusses respectively on the neoliberal values of individualism and managing poverty (e.g., Dickinson, 2019; Guthman, 2008).

Entanglements of care

For some women and non-binary activists, like Jolie, Camila, and Cooper, being part of the PCFA and volunteering at the farmers market constitute radical acts of self-care precisely because PCFA culture bends gender (and sexuality) norms in myriad ways, creating an affect and emotionally-laden space where they experience a sense of belonging and feel supported: "So at the market, I was able to make connections where I feel loved, accepted, I feel safe.... I'm not thinking it's an inherent quality of me to be alone in the world" (Jolie). In this way, the procurement and distribution of healthy, chemical-free food, as well as interpersonal and community relationship building, constitute gendered and intertwined acts of self-care and care for others, resonating with Ahmed's (2014) theorizing of self-care as radical and relational. For others, like Ned and Alicia, the very fact that they can "take breaks" allows them to engage in a form of self-care, though not without costs for Alicia. While Ned seems to truly experience these breaks as acts of self-care (e.g., going camping or taking a month off to visit family), Alicia's decidedly gendered response of feeling guilty (e.g., Kennelly, 2014) is unsurprising given the way social and cultural norms, especially those entrenched in modern neoliberal feminisms

(Rottenberg, 2014) relegate women to care for themselves and others, despite deep emotional costs to their own wellbeing.

Thus, the negotiation between caring for others and self-care emerges as explicitly gendered when self-care involves “taking a break” (Alicia feels guilt and Ned does not), but appears to be experienced by men and women alike when it entails nourishing one’s sense of belonging by being present at the market (Jolie, Camila, and Cooper). These findings suggest, like Jarosz’s (2011) study of women community supported agriculture farmers in the U.S., that care for others and self-care are not always mutually exclusive and that self-care, as Ahmed (2014) emphasizes, is indeed relational for vulnerable groups. In contrast to neoliberal feminist renderings of self-care (Rottenberg, 2014) that emphasize individualist forms of self-actualization, liberation (the self is autonomous), and consumption (anyone can buy their way to self-care), especially for women, these findings suggest that self-care is relational and intimately tied to a sense of belonging, the formation of relationships with like-minded people, and the building of community. This research also suggests that women continue to be interpellated into volunteerism in ways distinct from men, insofar as they experience guilt more profoundly when withdrawing to care for self (e.g., Kennelly, 2014).

Conclusion: Feminist care ethics and approaches to food system change

As our analysis demonstrates, PCFA activists most closely align their actual on-the-ground practices with progressive approaches to food system change, though their theoretical orientation (e.g., scathing critiques of neoliberal capitalism and emphasis on food sovereignty through the provision of a community seed exchange) is also very much rooted in the Radical trend (Holt-Giménez & Shattuck, 2011).

The feminist care lens invoked in this article uniquely illuminates potential relationships between Progressive and Radical trends in food systems change. As we have demonstrated, progressive-oriented PCFA activists manifest their care for others in terms of improving access to fresh, healthy food, building, growing, and supporting the community, and “showing up for my friends” (Jolie, 2019). Collectively, these findings suggest that activists see themselves as effecting change through food, and also reflect a deep orientation toward their most immediate relationships and surroundings, rather than the systems and structures that have created food insecurity in the first place (e.g., Guthman, 2008). However, juxtaposing their care work with their pointed critiques of neoliberal capitalism and structural poverty and racism, suggests that activists may have an orientation toward more radically-focussed work, if provided the right kinds of relationships, support, and tools. That is, we suggest that knowledge of failing systems and social inequalities might be necessary but not sufficient for radical change. Instead, activists are also compelled to carry out their work because they care. Understanding the processes in which activists come to care, as well as how their care manifests in practice in gendered ways provides important insight into their orientation toward change and how they might envision

change for the future (Neoliberal, Reformist, Progressive, or Radical). These insights could be particularly salient if, as Holt-Giménez and Shattuck suggest, the political amorphousness of progressively-oriented organizations means they can “turn towards reform and neoliberalism or towards radical, class-based engagement” (2011, p. 133). Further, they also suggest how more radically-focussed organizations can mobilize progressively-oriented activists—relationship-building at the local level that remains acutely attuned to the affective domain, especially for women and non-binary people who see their work as connected to a relational kind of self-care. For example, PCFA activists clearly care about food and structural injustices, which could be a starting point for engagement. Then, approaches rooted in critical food systems education and political education could tie activists’ knowledge of food systems to wider, systemic issues that impact them personally (e.g., homophobia, misogyny, racism, sexism) (Kerr, et al., 2022, this issue; Meek & Tarlau, 2016, 2020; Valley et al., 2020), while also providing resources for deeper, radical engagement and community-building.

And finally, we suggest that there is a great need for further research regarding the gendered dimensions of caring labor in differing approaches to food systems transformation, including how care work might subvert neoliberal systems that lead to structural inequalities. While we contend that care practices embedded in volunteerism can actually visibilize systemic inequalities in complex ways, we also believe that care practices are still problematically gendered, especially in how they neoliberally induce women into feeling guilt when they do not pick up the slack for the failing state and corporate America.

References

- Agyeman, J. & McEntee, J. (2014). Moving the field of food justice forward through the lens of urban political ecology. *Geography Compass*, 8(3): 211-220.
<https://doi.org/10.1111/gec3.12122>
- Ahmed, S. (2014, August 25). *Selfcare as warfare [Web log comment]*. feministkilljoys.
<https://feministkilljoys.com/2014/08/25/selfcare-as-warfare/comment-page-1/#comment-9620>
- Alkon, A. H., & Guthman J. (Eds.). (2017). *The new food activism: Opposition, cooperation, and collective action*. The University of California Press.
- Allen, P., & Sachs, C. (2007). Women and food chains: The gendered politics of food. *International Journal of Sociology of Food and Agriculture*, 15(1), 1-23.
<https://doi.org/10.48416/ijfsaf.v15i1.424>
- Avakian, A. V., & Haber, B. (Eds.). (2005). *From Betty Crocker to feminist food studies: Critical perspectives on women and food*. University of Massachusetts Press.

- Carpio, G. (2019). *Collisions at the crossroads: How place and mobility make race*. University of California Press.
- Clendenning, J., Dressler, W. H., & Richards, C. (2015). Food justice or food sovereignty? Understanding the rise of urban food movements in the USA. *Agriculture and Human Values*, 33, 165-177. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10460-015-9625-8>
- Collins, P. H. (2008). *Black feminist thought: Knowledge, consciousness, and the politics of empowerment*. Routledge.
- Collins, A. M. (2018). Old habits die hard: The need for feminist rethinking in global food and agricultural policies. *Canadian Food Studies*, 5(1), 19-38. <https://doi.org/10.15353/cfs-reea.v5i1.228>
- Dickinson, M. (2019). *Feeding the crisis: Care and abandonment in America's food safety net*. University of California Press.
- Donovan, J., & Adams, C. (2007). (Eds.). *The feminist care tradition in animal ethics*. Columbia University Press.
- Edelman, M., Weis, T., Baviskar, A., Borras, S. M., Holt-Giménez, E., Kandiyoti, D., & Wolford, W. (2014). Introduction: Critical perspectives on food sovereignty. *Journal of Peasant Studies*, 41(6), 911-931. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03066150.2014.963568>
- Figueroa, M., & Alkon, A. H. (2017). Cooperative social practices, self-determination, and the struggle for food justice in Oakland and Chicago. In A. H. Alkon & J. Guthman (Eds.), *The new food activism: Opposition, cooperation, and collective action* (pp. 206-231). University of California Press.
- Fisher, A. (2017). *Big hunger: The unholy alliance between corporate America and anti-hunger groups*. MIT Press.
- Fornet-Betancourt, R., Becker H., Gomez-Müller, A., & Gauthier, J. D. (1987). The ethic of care for the self as a practice of freedom: An interview with Michel Foucault on January 10, 1984. *Philosophy Social Criticism*, 12, 112-131. <https://doi.org/10.1177/019145378701200202>
- Friedmann, H. (1987). International regimes of food and agriculture since 1870. In T. Shanin (Ed.), *Peasants and peasant societies* (pp. 258-276). Basil Blackwell.
- Friedmann, H., & McMichael, P. (1989). Agriculture and the state system: The rise and fall of national agricultures, 1870 to the present. *Sociologia Ruralis*, 29(2), 93-117. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9523.1989.tb00360.x>
- Gilligan, C. (1982). *In a different voice: Psychological theory and women's development*. Harvard University Press.

- Gorski, P. C. (2019). Racial battle fatigue and activist burnout in racial justice activists of color at predominantly White colleges and universities. *Race Ethnicity & Education*, 22(1), 1-20. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13613324.2018.1497966>
- Growing Roots. (2017). *Our roots*. <https://www.wearegrowingroots.org/our-roots.html>
- Guthman, J. (2008). Bringing good food to others: Investigating the subjects of alternative food practice. *Cultural Geographies*, 15(4), 431-447. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/1474474008094315>
- Hammersley, M., & Atkinson, P. (2007). *Ethnography: Principles in practice*. Routledge.
- Hankivsky, O. (2014). Rethinking care ethics: On the promise and potential of an intersectional analysis. *The American Political Science Review*, 108(2), 252-264.
- Haraway, D. (1988). Situated knowledges: The science question in feminism and the privilege of partial perspective. *Feminist Studies*, 14(3), 575-599.
- Harding, S. (1991). *Whose science? Whose knowledge?* Cornell University Press.
- Holt-Giménez, E., & Shattuck, A. (2011). Food crises, food regimes, and movements: Rumblings of reform or tides of transformation? *Journal of Peasant Studies*, 38(1), 109-144. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03066150.2010.538578>
- Hyatt, S. B. (2001). From citizen to volunteer: Neoliberal governance and the erasure of poverty. In J. Goode & J. Maskovsky (Eds.), *The new poverty studies: The ethnography of power, politics, and impoverished people in the United States* (pp. 201-235). New York University Press.
- Jarosz, L. (2011). Nourishing women: Toward a feminist political ecology of community supported agriculture in the United States. *Gender, Place, and Culture: A Journal of Feminist Geography*, 18(3), 307-326. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0966369X.2011.565871>
- Julier, A. (2019). Critiquing hegemony, creating food, crafting justice, cultivating an activist feminist food studies. In J. Brady, B. Parker, S. Belyea, & E. Power (Eds.), *Feminist food studies: Exploring intersectionality* (pp. 13-32). Women's Press.
- Kennelly, J. (2014). 'It's this pain in my heart that won't let me stop'; Gendered affect, webs of relations, and young women's activism. *Feminist Theory*, 15(3), 241-260. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1464700114544611>
- Kerr, R., Richan, E., Fenton, A., & Sproule, C. (2022). Striving toward a peasant identity: The influence of the global peasant movement on three women farmers in Canada. *Canadian Food Studies / La Revue Canadienne des études sur l'alimentation* 9(2), 205-225. <https://doi.org/10.15353/cfs-rcea.v9i2.535>

- Kimura, A. H. (2016). *Radiation brain moms and citizen scientists: The gender politics of food contamination after Fukushima*. Duke University Press.
- Kurtz, H., Borron, A., Shannon J., & Weaver, A. (2019). Community food assistance, informal social networks, and the labor of care. *Agriculture and Human Values*, 36, 495-505. DOI:10.1007/s10460-019-09943-0
- Lloro, T. (2021). An intersectional feminist food studies praxis: Activism and care in the COVID-19 context. *Journal of Environmental Education*, 52(5), 303-313. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00958964.2021.1981209>
- Lorde, A. (2017). *A burst of light and other essays*. Ixia Press.
- Los Angeles County Department of Public Health. (2018). *City and Community Health Profiles: Pomona*. <http://publichealth.lacounty.gov/ohae/docs/cchp/pdf/2018/Pomona.pdf>
- Mares, T. M. (2017). Navigating gendered labor and local food: A tale of working mothers in Vermont. *Food and foodways*, 25(3), 177-192. <https://doi.org/10.1080/07409710.2017.1343064>
- Márquez, A. (2021). Detached attachment: Burnout and commitment among caregivers in the immigrant rights movement. *Critical Sociology*, 47(4-5), 727-743. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0896920520966371>
- Martin, M. (2019). Digging through urban agriculture with feminist theoretical implements. *Canadian Food Studies*, 6(3), 88-107. <https://doi.org/10.15353/cfs-rcea.v6i3.356>
- McCullen, C. G. (2008). Why are all the white kids sitting together at the farmers market? Whiteness in the Davis Farmers Market and alternative agrifood movement. [Unpublished master's thesis]. University of California, Davis.
- McMichael, P. (2007). A food regime genealogy. *The Journal of Peasant Studies*, 36(1), 139-169. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03066150902820354>
- Meek, D., & Tarlau, R. (2016). Critical food systems education (CFSE): Educating for food sovereignty. *Agroecology and Sustainable Food Systems*, 40(3), 237-260. <https://doi.org/10.1080/21683565.2015.1130764>
- Meek, D., & Tarlau, R. (2020). Educating for ecosocialism: Beyond its renowned direct-action strategies, Brazil's Landless Workers movement also models political education as an indispensable tool for incubating transformative alternatives. *NACLA Report on the Americas*, 52(2), 206-213. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10714839.2020.1768745>

- Meierotto, L., & Castellano, R. S. (2019). Food provisioning strategies among Latinx farm workers in southwestern Idaho. *Agriculture and Human Values*, 37, 209-223. DOI: 10.1007/s10460-019-09959-6
- Montenegro de Wit, M. (2021). What grows from a pandemic? Toward an abolitionist agroecology. *Journal of Peasant Studies* 48(1), 99-136. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03066150.2020.1854741>
- Moon, S. (2021). Women's food work, food citizenship, & transnational consumer capitalism: A case study of a feminist food cooperative in South Korea. *Food, Culture, & Society*. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15528014.2021.1892255>
- Pepin-Neff, C., & Wynter, T. (2019). The costs of pride: Survey results from LGBTQI activists in the United States, United Kingdom, and Australia. *Politics & Gender*, 16(2), 498-524. doi:10.1017/S1743923X19000205
- Polanyi, K. (1944). *The great transformation*. Beacon Press.
- Pomona Community Farmer Alliance. (2019). *Our goals*. <http://pomonacfa.org/>
- Portman, A. (2018). Food sovereignty and gender justice. *Journal of agricultural and environmental ethics*, 31, 455-466. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10806-018-9739-2>
- Puig de la Bellacasa, M. (2017). (Ed.). *Matters of care: Speculative ethics in more than human worlds*. University of Minnesota Press.
- Rottenberg, C. (2014). The rise of neoliberal feminism. *Cultural Studies*, 28(3), 418-437. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09502386.2013.857361>
- Saldaña, J. (2013). *The coding manual for qualitative researchers* (2nd ed.). Sage.
- Shisler, R. C., & Sbicca, J. (2019). Agriculture as carework: The contradictions of performing femininity in a male-dominated occupation. *Society & Natural Resources*, 32(8), 875-892. <https://doi.org/10.1080/08941920.2019.1597234>
- Steager, T. (2013). Women, food, and activism: Rediscovering collectivist action in an individualized world. In C. Craven & D. Davis (Eds.), *Feminist activist ethnography: Counterpoints to neoliberalism in North America* (pp. 165-180). Lexington Books.
- Tronto, J. (1993). *Moral boundaries: A political argument for an ethic of care*. Routledge.
- Trauger, A. (2017). Community-based rights to food sovereignty: The case of the local food and community self-governance ordinances in Maine, USA. In A. A. Desmarais, P. Claeys, & A. Trauger (Eds.), *Public policies for food sovereignty: Social movements and the state* (pp. 53-69). Routledge.

- Trevilla-Espinal, D. L., Soto Pinto, M. L., Morales, H., & Estrada-Lugo, I. J. (2021). Feminist agroecology: Analyzing power relationships in food systems. *Agroecology and sustainable food systems*, 45(7), 1029-1049. <https://doi.org/10.1080/21683565.2021.1888842>
- Tung, A., Redwood, R. R., & Cloutier, D. (2022). Breadlines, victory gardens, or human rights?: examining food insecurity discourses in Canada. *Canadian Food Studies / La Revue Canadienne des études sur l'alimentation* 9(2), 249-276. <https://doi.org/10.15353/cfs-rcea.v9i2.530>
- United States Department of Agriculture (USDA). (n.d.). Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC). <https://www.fns.usda.gov/wic>
- Valley, W., Anderson, M., Blackstone, M. T., Sterling, E., Betley, E., Akabas, S., Koch, P., Dring, C., Burke, J., & Spiller, K. (2020). Toward an equity competency model for sustainable food systems education. *Elementa*, 8(33), 1-16. <https://doi.org/10.1525/elementa.428>
- Warf, B. (2021). The coronavirus pandemic and American neoliberalism. *Geographical Review*, 111(4), 496-509. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00167428.2021.1884981>
- White, M. (2019). *Freedom farmers: Agricultural resistance and the Black freedom movement*. University of North Carolina Press.

Original Research Article

Striving toward a peasant identity: The influence of the global peasant movement on three women farmers in Canada

Roseann Kerr^{a*}, Erin Richan, Ayla Fenton^b and Coral Sproule^b

^a Lakehead University

^b National Farmers Union Board Member

Abstract

As diverse actors work through disparate food movements seeking to tackle the causes and effects of the global food crisis, Holt-Giménez and Shattuck (2011) call for strategic alliances between progressive and radical trends in the food movement to transform our current food system. They identify the relationship between the National Farmers Union and *La Via Campesina* (LVC) as an interesting example of alliances across class. This paper focuses on the process of alliance formation by exploring the subjectivities of three of the authors who identify as women farmers and have had opportunities to learn from and engage with peasant movements through their participation in courses, encounters and organizing spaces of LVC. These farmers' goal of striving toward a peasant identity reveals the influence of peasant-to-peasant processes (PtPP) on their conceptions of possible futures. Simultaneously their experiences expose tensions and struggles of living the peasant way as women farmers in the Canadian context. Through a collective case study we explore how radical peasant movements facilitate re-peasantization and the restructuring of our ways of relating with the earth and each other in the global North. Based on this analysis we deepen our understanding of how PtPP can foster South-North solidarities which have the potential to grow radical movements toward food system transformation.

Keywords: Women farmers; re-peasantization, food movement solidarity; Popular Peasant Feminism; coalition identities; La Via Campesina; Canada

*Corresponding author: rosiekerr.education@gmail.com

DOI: 10.15353/cfs-rcea.v9i2.535

ISSN: 2292-3071

Introduction

As diverse actors work through disparate food movements seeking to tackle the causes and effects of the global food crisis, Holt-Giménez and Shattuck (2011) call for strategic alliances across difference to transform our current food system. They argue that alliances between progressive and radical movement actors¹ are necessary to effect transformative change. They point to the National Farmers Union (NFU), a founding and active member of La Via Campesina (LVC), a global peasant organization, as an interesting example of alliances built across class. Despite the class differences between Canadian farmers and peasants, the NFU shares LVCs political position against neoliberalism and considers itself part of the broader peasant movement that seeks food system transformation through agroecology and food sovereignty. (National Farmers Union [NFU], 2021). As a founding and active member of LVC, the NFU has been a part of building a global peasant movement for many decades, building international solidarity through exchange opportunities for Canadian farmers since the 1970s. This collaboration laid the groundwork for their co-founding of LVC in the 1990s.

Re-peasantization has been identified as an important mode of resistance to the globalization of industrial neoliberal agriculture, and an avenue of growth for agroecology and food sovereignty movements (Desmarais, 2008; van der Ploeg, 2010, 2012; Val et al., 2019). Within LVC, reclaiming the peasant identity as a positive signifier of collective knowledge and power, rather than its colloquial pejorative meaning, has been a deliberate act of resistance (NFU, 2021). LVC uses an intentionally broad definition of peasant, defined as “people of the land,” to facilitate the building of coalitions across geographies based on shared struggles (Edelman, 2013; Desmarais, 2008). Desmarais, identifies the construction of a collective peasant identity as one of LVC’s most important accomplishments. This shared identity is not a given, but a complex process and a powerful political achievement in the context of globalization (Desmarais, 2008). Some NFU members have “rediscovered” or reclaimed their identity as peasants. As such, re-peasantization in Canada is embedded in the collective history of LVC that many NFU leaders helped construct through collective organizing (Desmarais, 2008).

Val et al. (2019) describes the pedagogy within LVC movement organizing spaces as peasant-to-peasant processes (PtPP) that are responsible for “the collective (re)construction of subjectivities” (p. 882) toward the emergence of what they call *agroecological peasants*. They describe the agroecological peasant as a “particular peasant emergence in the twenty-first century”. They define this emergence as a historical and political subject that is “agroecological, organized and antihegemonic” (p. 879). Rosset et al. (2019) argue that *agroecological peasants* are the central subjects who will lead the transformation of our food system by materializing agroecology and food sovereignty. We explore in this paper how re-peasantization is further

¹ Progressive actors are explained by Holt-Giménez and Shattuck as those that work within the current political and economic system to advance alternatives to the agri-food model, and radical actors are those who work for food system change by advocating for anti-imperialist, anti-capitalist structural reforms under the umbrella of food sovereignty.

facilitated in Canada through the transformation of subjects through PtPP. We do this through the exploration of a case of how three young women farmers, from non-farming backgrounds, came to strive toward a peasant identity and thus join the global peasant movement. We deepen Val et al.'s (2019) analysis of PtPP by sharing reflections from farmer authors with experiences in PtPP to understand how they have led to subject transformation.

In the Canadian context, this analysis is timely because researchers and activists have identified an emerging trend of young people, especially women, identifying themselves as first generation farmers interested in ecologically sustainable farming methods (LaForge et al., 2018). These authors describe first generation farmers as an important demographic because of the low percentage of farmers in the Canadian population (1.7 percent), a continuing decline in farmers, an aging farmer population, and the low percentage of farmers with a succession plan (8 percent) (LaForge et al., 2018; Statistics Canada, 2017). These new farmers present an opportunity to build the agroecology and food sovereignty movements in Canada. By deepening our understanding of the transformative potential of PtPP we can better understand how progressive actors, such as new farmers interested in ecological farming, can be radicalized through joining solidarity networks built between farmers in the global North and peasants in the global South.

Trevilla Espinal et al. (2021) argue that a transition to a more equitable and just food system must consider feminist contributions. Val et al. (2019) name popular peasant feminism (PPFem) as the way in which rural women's groups within LVC are using PtPP to collectively identify "how patriarchy manifests itself in their territories, in order to disarticulate the mechanisms of oppression and move toward more just gender relations" (p. 885). They argue PtPP have facilitated the formation of PPFem subjects who push for actions which build a post-patriarchal, post-capitalist vision of agroecology. PPFem is described as "a construction from below, signaling our demands and our shared struggles" at the intersection of class and gender (Graciele Seibert, 2017, p. 7). As women farmers in Canada, authors have shared struggles with peasant women and acknowledge differences in class. We explore how they negotiate these shared struggles and differences.

We ask: How did three young women, first generation farmers, from the global North come to strive toward a peasant identity and thus join the global peasant movement? Within this broad question we ask:

- a) How do these authors navigate shared struggles and class differences in their identification as peasants? and
- b) How do they attempt to enact a peasant identity in Canada?

To answer these questions, we first outline our conceptual and theoretical framing and methodology for this research. We then discuss farmer authors' experiences, followed by conclusions.

Conceptual and theoretical framing

Peasants are a large, culturally diverse, heterogeneous group including the rural poor, small scale farmers, landless agricultural workers, hunter gatherers, and fisher people who have been historically marginalized (Edelman, 2013). LVC has been working towards reclaiming the peasant identity as a positive descriptor of collective knowledge and power to produce food and build community (Desmarais, 2008; NFU, 2021). For example, La Via Campesina, meaning “the peasant way,” is an affirmation of an agrarian lifestyle, the peasant mode of production and the peasant identity. This challenges historical and contemporary discourses that conceptualize peasants as “less than,” in need of development, and in need of modernization. LVC represents a global peasant movement which is “reasserting the right to farm as a social act of stewardship of the land and food redistribution against the destabilizing and exclusionary impacts of the neoliberal model” (McMichael, 2006, p. 412). It is important to note that many peasants are not involved in political movements. This paper focuses on the political conceptualization of the peasant identity within LVC. We understand this as a coalition identity² that was intentionally constructed/reclaimed to build solidarity across difference (Desmarais, 2008). Carastathis (2013) describes coalition identities “as internally heterogeneous, complex unities constituted by their internal differences” (p. 942). Following Crenshaw (1990), she argues that identities can be conceived as coalitions, either active or potential. Within an identity category, such as peasant, there are different intersections with other identities related to, for example, gender or sexuality. Peasant identity then, can be conceived as a coalition between male and female peasants, for example. Emphasizing intersectionality *within* identity categories opens possibilities for “political alliances that cross existing identity categories” (Carastathis, 2013, 942).

Accompanying the political peasant movement there has been a resurgence of peasant agricultural practices across the globe, including in the global North (van der Ploeg, 2010, 2012). Peasant modes of production are characterized as co-production, “the interaction and mutual transformation of human actors and living nature” (van der Ploeg, 2014, p. 4). This co-production has also been called agroecology. Agroecology is a set of farming approaches that focus on regenerating soil fertility and managing pests without relying on external chemical inputs (Gliessman, 2015). What sets peasant modes of production apart from capitalist modes is skepticism, or rejection, of the market as the primary organizing principle for food production (van der Ploeg, 2014). Instead, peasant agriculture values non-commodity relationships and strives towards autonomy and the preservation of a “self-governed resource base that allows for co-production” (van der Ploeg, 2010, p. 3). The mutual relationship with local ecology and the emphasis on working with local fertility found in peasant modes of production are a contrast to capitalist modes of production that have an extractive relationship to the land and wherein daily

² For more information on coalitional politics and identity politics see Crenshaw (1990) and Carastathis (2013).

choices are based on a profit motive (van der Ploeg, 2010). Many peasants continue to engage with the capitalist system through participation in territorial markets, and off-farm work. Although off-farm work was once understood to be a sign of the transition out of peasant agriculture, van der Ploeg (2012) argues it should be understood as pluriactivity, a strategy to support the continuance of a peasant livelihood.

The recent spread of agroecology across the globe has been called the agroecology movement. As a movement its goals include empowering the peasantry, supporting peasant autonomy, revaluing Indigenous knowledge, reducing dependence on agrochemical inputs, and aligning agricultural production with natural ecosystems (Astier et al., 2017). This movement advocates for holistic food system change including ecological, economic, political, and social transformation toward more equitable relations among food system actors (Altieri, 2009; Gliessman, 2015). The goals of the agroecology movement align and intertwine with global peasant movements toward food sovereignty. Popularized by La Via Campesina, food sovereignty is a concept that represents a movement to focus/centralize control of land, water, seeds, and production decisions in the hands of those who are producing food, rather than ceding control to global market forces (Martínez-Torres & Rosset, 2010). LaForge et al. (2018) describes agroecology as the praxis of the food sovereignty movement. In other words, agroecology describes the ways in which one enacts and reflects on, practices toward the goals of food sovereignty. Val et al. (2019) contend that it is through peasant-to-peasant processes (PtPP) that “agroecology is built and legitimized as a field of existence possibilities for peasant lifestyles” (p. 878). Said another way, peasants are the social carrier of agroecology (van der Ploeg, 2012). Val et al. (2019) argue that PtPP lead to the emergence of the collective identity of *agroecological peasants* through a process of (re)construction of subjectivities.

Subjectivity describes “the conscious and unconscious thoughts and emotions of the individual, her sense of herself and her ways of understanding her relation to her world” (Weedon, 1987, p. 32). We use a post-structural feminist lens to understand subjectivity and subject transformation because it challenges the idea that identity is stable. Through this lens, identities are instead, socially embedded, constructed, and continually being reconfigured through relations and in response to societal discourse and language (St. Pierre, 2000). In post-structural feminism, identities are understood as symbolic social categories that subjects claim, enact, transform, and/or resist over time.³ Subjects are also constrained or disciplined by these categories through the language we use and the discourses that shape what is possible within them (Butler, 1992). For example, who is allowed to identify as a farmer or not, and what it means to be a farmer changes depending on cultural context, societal discourse, and cultural practice. Subjects can and do choose to resist, to change cultural practices and challenge discourses and narratives (Butler, 1992). However, as we explore in this paper, for someone who identifies as a farmer, it is not a simple choice to identify as a peasant, but involves a

³ Importantly, subjects inhabit multiple identities that intersect. For further information see Crenshaw (1990) and Butler (1992).

transformation of her subjectivity—her sense of herself in relation to the world. We ask, “How is it that we become available to a transformation of who we are, a contestation which compels us to rethink ourselves?” (Butler, 1995, p. 131). To understand this transformation, we explore PtPP.

Val et al. (2019) describes PtPP as a “horizontal process of collective training and promotion of agroecology” (p. 881). Authors describe the transformation or reconfiguration of subjectivities as occurring in PtPP through the facilitation of an environment of trust in which different ways of being can be expressed, and through which, “doing, living, and producing locally are integrated into broader political discourse with mutual feedback” (p. 879). In other words, subjects form relationships of mutual respect, express common or disparate epistemologies and ontologies, and engage in praxis that connects their daily actions as producers of food to political discourse. Drawing on the work of Val et al. (2019) and Rosset et al. (2019), as well as our collective experiences, we characterize the pedagogy of PtPP as emphasizing the development of personal relationships through spending time understanding each other’s experiences. These relationships build solidarity for collective action.

An important medium for PtPP are encounters, meetings, exchanges, courses, and convergences⁴ organized by various member organizations of LVC.⁵ These various ways of engaging, exchanging, and coming together are the loci for PtPP (Val et al., 2019). These vary in length from several days to two weeks. To create a common understanding through listening and empathy, meetings at these events begin with conversations, giving space to each organization to share their experiences and priority areas of work. Following this sharing is a phase of engagement in collective analysis of common threads to generate ideas for collective action. These processes facilitate dialogue across differences that “tie together different knowledges, territories and experiences” (Val et al., 2019, p. 881). This process is called *diálogo de saberes* (dialogue of knowledges) where peasants, activists, and intellectuals express, discuss and name concepts they collectively create based on their experiences (Martínez-Torres & Rosset, 2014).

Importantly these events are participatory, often collectively organized by forming committees/teams of participants on the first day that have rotating responsibilities for various aspects of the experience. These responsibilities range from cooking, creating *sociodramas*,⁶ planning *mysticas*,⁷ and creating meeting agendas, to building and maintaining infrastructure. Events also include regional tours of farms and movement spaces including agroecology schools, land camps, and marches. This structure creates opportunities for informal socializing that

⁴ Encounters, meetings, courses, and convergences will be referred to in the paper as events, unless specifically referenced in a quotation.

⁵ Because of the regional organizational structure of LVC these events could involve member organizations within a region or between regions. For example, NFU participates in North American regional events with member organizations Quebec, U.S., and Mexico as well as in international events in various other regions.

⁶ *Sociodramas* are collectively created group skits whose purpose is to illustrate issues and/or learnings important to the group.

⁷ *Mysticas* are collectively organized rituals that allow for the expression of spiritual/cultural traditions of the participants. They typically occur each morning and often include poetry, music, dance, or other arts.

facilitates relationship formation while people share accommodations, exchange seeds, and cook together.

Of particular importance to this case are the farmer authors' experiences with Popular Peasant Feminism (PPFem) within LVC. PPFem⁸ emerged through PtPP, collectively constructed over many years beginning with demands by women in LVC for more representation and power in decision making (Desmarais, 2008; Graciele Seiber, 2017). This PPFem has been most strongly articulated in the written form by *Campesinas* from Coordinadora Latinoamericana de Organizaciones Campesinas (CLOC). Within LVC, CLOC represents women from eighteen countries in the Americas and has 400 delegates from peasant, rural, Afro-descendant, and Indigenous organisations (Graciele Seiber, 2017; Pena, 2017). Delegates articulate PPFem as an action-oriented approach that focuses on a) transforming relationships between humans and nature; b) ending patriarchal relations in the family, community, organizations, and society; c) valuing women's productive and reproductive work; and d) increasing access for women to land, education, transportation, and health services (Graciele Seiber, 2017).

PPFem advocates for new relationships between nature and humans that “value peasant agriculture, question the exploitation of the earth, land, and water grabbing, and extractivism” (Graciele Seiber, 2017, p. 8).⁹ It advocates for a more harmonious form of food production that pushes against “the conception of nature as a dead space, a space without life,” as such, it works to “rescue and create new forms of living that were lost with the entry of capitalism” (Graciele Seiber, 2017, p. 8). PPFem also calls for an end to patriarchy where, for example, “the man is considered the boss of the family, the one who makes decisions, defines what to do, the one who receives and manages the financial compensation, when it is the entire family who does the work of production” (Graciele Seiber, 2017, p. 8). PPFem advocates for shared responsibility for care work to reduce women's workload including cooking, housework, and care for children and seniors (Trevilla Espinal et al., 2021; Graciele Seiber, 2017). Closely related is the need to recognize and value women's work and knowledge. In production work “women are considered assistants, secondaries, an appendix” (Graciele Seiber, 2017, p. 8). PPFem calls for the recognition of women's knowledge and work in production and reproduction of food, medicines, seeds, family, and community. PPFem identifies how this work generates value, not only through generating income, but “food and medicine produced in the home generates more value than what is achieved by selling it” (Graciele Seiber, 2017, p. 9). PPFem advocates for the growing of food for family use rather than purchasing it or selling it. It emphasizes a different form of richness or wealth (rather than economic) that this choice generates.

PPFem is described as popular because it was constructed by working class people in a collective way. It explicitly engages with class and gender in the production of inequalities

⁸ The form of popular peasant feminism discussed here has emerged in PtPP processes within LVC. For discussion of other popular peasant feminisms see the writings of Janet Conway (2017) and Renata Motta (2021).

⁹ All quotes from Graciele Seiber (2017) and Trevilla Espinal et al. (2021) are translated from Spanish to English by Kerr.

encountered in the daily lives of *Campesinas*.¹⁰ Importantly, “it is not a proposal that arrived from outside, of a particular intellectual thinker, or of a particular current of thought” (Graciele Seiber, 2017, p. 8). Responding to interest in PPFem from other LVC member organizations, *Campesinas* in CLOC advise that women “should construct their own concept within their own organizations and within their own region...with feet on the ground, constructed from below” (Graciele Seiber, 2017, p. 9). Recognizing the different social, political, economic, and cultural contexts experienced by the farmer authors in Canada and *Campesinas* in Latin America, we hold up PPFem as a model to learn from and to understand how we can contribute insights from situated feminist struggles.¹¹

Methodology and positionality

This qualitative research takes the form of a collectively developed case study of subject transformation of the three farmer authors.¹² To develop this case study, each farmer author participated in one to three individual open-ended interviews with Kerr. Farmer authors were asked to recall memories that stood out to them during their experiences in PtPP and reflect on how these experiences influenced them. Conversations were audio recorded, and notes were taken by Kerr, compiled into an outline, and sent to the rest of the authors to review. Authors then met as a group to identify themes. The farmer authors then wrote short reflections focussed on their experiences related to these themes. While Kerr took on the bulk of the writing, all authors were involved in editing each draft of the paper. Co-authorship was explicitly chosen to break down the barrier between researcher and subjects of research and create conditions for dialogue where knowledge could be co-created.¹³

All authors identify as white settler women. Kerr identifies as a scholar, and the others identify as farmers. Kerr initiated the case study after attending a LVC course with Richan in Cuba in 2017. Richan has worked on farms across Canada for eight years and operated a small-scale vegetable farm on rented land for four years, selling through a Community Supported

¹⁰ *Campesina* is an identity category used by rural women in Latin America to describe themselves. It roughly translates as peasant.

¹¹ This recognizes critiques of academic studies that use theoretical frameworks developed in one context and apply them to another. In this case, given the participatory nature of PtPP and farmer authors’ participation in convergences where PPFem is collectively formed, we discuss how these experiences have influenced farmer authors’ subjectivities.

¹² In this paper we present the first phase of a longer research process as we analyze our own experiences as white settlers learning through PtPP. Recognizing the limits of analysis from our white settler perspectives, in the next research phase, we intend to engage peasants in the global South as co-collaborators.

¹³ When “we” is used in this article it represents our collective analysis. Since Kerr does not identify as a farmer, the statements that refer only to the farmer authors use “farmer authors/they.”

Agriculture (CSA)¹⁴ and a farmers' market. She is currently working a non-farm job to be able to purchase land to farm. Initial dialogue for this case study occurred while Richan & Fenton were farming together in 2018. Fenton has worked on farms across Canada for over ten years. She coordinates urban agriculture for a food justice organization and has held various leadership positions in the NFU since 2015. Sproule joined the case study after informal conversations with Kerr about her experiences with the women's delegation of LVC in Brazil in March 2020. Sproule has been farming for sixteen years, works for a food justice organization and has held various leadership positions in the NFU for over fourteen years. Both Fenton and Sproule are active in transnational organizing networks with LVC.

Results

We see our experiences with PtPP as reminding us that “what [we] cannot imagine stands guard over everything that [we] must/can do, think, live” (Spivak, 1993, p. 22). Experiences with PtPP, visits to the global South, and especially engagement with PPFem have changed how we think of ourselves and our work, and what we imagine to be possible in the future. We understand these transformative learning experiences not as isolated incidents, but as remembered moments that are embedded in authors broader involvement in the social networks created by the NFU and LVC. We first discuss elements of the PtPP that led farmer authors to strive toward a peasant identity including: how *Diálogo de saberes* led to moments of dissonance which uncovered engrained assumptions; and how relationships developed through in-person dialogue and informal socializing. We then discuss how farmer authors navigate shared struggles and class differences in their identification as peasants, especially in relation to PPFem. This section includes how they were attracted to the peasant identity and pushed toward it by their exclusion from and rejection of the gendered capitalistic farming identity. Lastly, we discuss how farmer authors attempt to enact their peasant identity in the Canadian context.

Diálogo de saberes

We identify a process of transformation that began with *Diálogo de saberes* (Martínez-Torres & Rosset, 2014) where farmer authors encountered new discourses, knowledges, and people. These encounters with new discourses were not only with peasants from the global South, but also within the NFU and with Indigenous leaders from Canada who were part of LVC events. Fenton shared that her move toward a peasant identity was initiated by “learning about other ways of

¹⁴ Community Supported Agriculture is a system where people purchase a share of the harvest at the beginning of the season and receive/pick-up a box/basket of harvest at regular intervals throughout the growing season.

knowing and learning by example how to move into better relations with the land and with my community.” We identify participating in face-to-face dialogue as important in this transformation.

Farmer authors identified moments of dissonance with their worldview when they encountered novel ways of understanding the world. Richan explained: “When I joined the NFU, I learned about agroecology, LVC, and that small holders were actually feeding the world. It was a revelation to me that small scale growers were powerful agents, building resilience in their systems and networks that the global corporate food systems couldn’t replace.... This challenged what I had been fed in university: that these alternatives would never be enough, the industrial ag model was the only way to feed the world.”

In these moments of dissonance, language used to define identities were contrasted and unexamined assumptions were brought to the surface. Sproule remembered: “It wasn’t until I was there, faced with other people who all identified as part of the peasant struggle that I even thought about it. That first youth convergence in Argentina was very eye opening for me. Trying to identify where the language of peasant farming and the language of the family farm that we use in the NFU converges, but also the differences...conversations challenged things I didn’t realize were deeply engrained like private property ownership.”

Fenton agreed and added: “Learning from movements like the MST [Movimento dos Trabalhadores Sem Terra]¹⁵ in Brazil started to show me that private land ownership is not necessary for building a strong movement for food sovereignty and agroecology. Because of these experiences, many of us in the NFU are now deeply engaged in exploring alternative land tenure models and collective/cooperative farming models.”

The way PtPP challenged implicit beliefs in the necessity of private land ownership and inspired these farmers to explore alternatives provides a powerful example of the radicalizing potential of the praxis within radical trends in the food movement (Holt-Giménez & Shattuck, 2011).

As farmers were exposed to other ways of knowing through PtPP with Indigenous peoples, they were confronted with their entrenchment in Western productivist discourse. Fenton explained: “When we invited Indigenous leaders from Canada to be guests at the LVC international conference in Basque country, they pushed back against how we were understanding agroecology. They pushed us to recognize we were using a productivist, extractivist framing in our approach.”

This is an example of how *diálogo de saberes* created moments of dissonance that forced farmers to confront how capitalistic discourses of production and extraction intertwine with settler colonialism and continue to displace Indigenous people and their ways of being and knowing. These experiences led to an understanding that deconstructing our own ways of thinking was critical to building relationships of solidarity with Indigenous peoples in our own territories as well as with those from the global South.

¹⁵ Or the Landless Workers' Movement in Brazil.

Farmer authors spoke of how their encounters with PPFem built their understanding of feminism and influenced their conceptions of agroecology. For example, Richan explained how she hadn't previously considered the idea of "farming as reproductive labour rather than productive labour, and the fertility of soil as central to this work". She pointed to how learning this language brought into contrast the language of "cash cropping" that reinforces extractivist narratives around farming in Canada where land is "mined for profit." Through learning the alternative language of PPFem, she began to notice how extractive language is used uncritically by farmers in Canada without recognizing what kind of relationship it represents. Learning the language of PPFem shifted her understanding of agroecology from a farming technique to a way of living. Farmer authors explained how they now understood that, by fostering nurturing relationships with land through their investment of labour, land reciprocates support for them and other life forms in exchange.

Acting in relationship

We identify in-person events as important in building relationships, understanding alternatives, and connecting our lives to other actors in the food system. Sproule explained that "seeing agroecology in action from soil to community to policy brings clarity to our own sense of identity and goal of building something together." As Fenton explained, reading about migrant worker struggles did not have as much impact as hearing from workers directly:

At my first LVC meeting, issues I had read about and understood in a very theoretical way, suddenly became very real when I was hearing stories from migrant workers face-to-face. That meeting really feels like a turning point in my life. I began to understand how my experience and lifestyle as a privileged urban white kid in Canada was inextricably linked to the experience of others in the food system. I realized that it wasn't enough to grow organic food for rich people; if I wanted to make a real difference, I needed to engage in this movement to completely reclaim and reimagine our food system.

She explained further: "when we go to these places and learn about harm being done to people, face-to-face, we have a moral imperative to change our actions; we can no longer be complicit." This is an example of how the pedagogies of PtPP engage actors in conversations with each other that bring to light mutual feedback between local practices of disparate geographies and larger political discourses (Val et al., 2019). She understood her actions to be in relationship with the struggles of these actors. This understanding initiated a change in her approach to farming and her joining of the peasant movement.

We identify the conversational and collaborative nature of meetings and informal socializing that occurs while people share accommodations, cook together, and eat together as important in forming relationships that enable us to act in genuine solidarity. Relationships of

mutual respect formed and reinforced through collective organizing in PtPP are also key to envisioning and validating alternative visions and pulling farmer authors into the peasant movement. Fenton shared, “Connecting through these in-person, especially North-South exchanges, helps us connect on the basis of shared humanity.” As Cassia Bechara, the coordinator of international affairs for the MST, writes, “being together to debate, exchange experiences, talk about our limits and challenges as women in the struggle is fundamental.” (Movimento dos Trabalhadores Rurales Sem Terra [MST], 2020). Sproule shared:

My continual involvement with peasant movements has given me validation for my anti-capitalist work. Having women peasant role models has been vital to shifting this point of view.... It is the connection through solidarity and exchange that has been integral in envisioning a more just world through collective struggle and care of one another...the normalizing of brutality and exploitation in a capitalist society is not something we have to be part of, this lie of capitalism and comfort.... Most importantly, I have a community, which I didn't feel I had before.... Farming alone can be very isolating.... If we ask ourselves what it is we are seeking about this [peasant] identity. For myself, a lot of it is personal. I have had a lack of intergenerational connection, I feel this is a void in my life.... I am attracted to this idea of wisdom sharing across generations through food and the strong family connections, strong social values.

Peasant role models were important in shifting her point of view and offering the possibility of more just relationships of collective struggle and care. Relationships developed through PtPP offer entry into a community, creating a strong attraction to the collective peasant identity. We identify dialogues, relationships, and collective organizing with women peasants as especially influential to farmer authors' transformation.

Navigating class differences

We discussed what it means to identify as a peasant in the current Canadian context, where calling someone a peasant would be considered, by many, to be an insult. Farmer authors spoke of their experiences with PtPP as humbling reminders of their own privilege and collective power to act to effect change. Fenton explained how PtPP helped her, “to recognize my privilege to make choices, and to more deeply analyze what to do with my privilege.” Understanding class differences influenced how they felt comfortable identifying and led to a choice of *striving toward* rather than claiming the peasant identity:

Fenton: It's about striving to move beyond my deeply engrained white North American ideals of private property, economic success, individualism, and domination over the land.

Richan: It is a different way of thinking about wealth, and experiencing what it means to have wealth without money.

Fenton: This means trying to live within the means of what the land provides. Within this lifestyle the cost of living is low precisely because you are living off the land that feeds you. Some people might think of this as a sacrifice, but when you start to realize that when the land sustains you, you receive so much more. Striving toward peasant identity means continuing to develop a two-way relationship with land...there is a focus on thinking about responsibility and belonging to land.

Sproule: This sense of sacrifice comes from the fact that those with privilege in our Canadian culture can choose not to struggle, there is a very comfortable life that can be achieved without living this struggle.

This conversation reflects that choosing a peasant identity or not is a choice that the farmer authors have the privilege to make, that others in marginalized subject positions are not afforded. Striving toward this identity, rather than claiming it, represents a recognition of their privileged positions in being able to choose this lifestyle. For example, Fenton asked, “Can we call ourselves peasants if we have a choice whether or not to rely only on the land for our survival?” Sproule added: “It is important to recognize and remember that peasants are being murdered and kidnapped every day for defending their land and their politics. We have to be careful to not romanticize this idea. Maybe we all want to be peasants, but we have to recognize the privilege that we do come from, and the differences there.... We are seeing the best version of it and not having to go through actually living under the hand of violence or oppression that peasants have to live through.”

While embracing the goals of PPFem, farmer authors recognize their class difference. Most women in Canada have relatively equitable access to transportation, education, and health services, whereas many *Campesinas* do not (Graciele Seibert, 2017). While farmer authors have all struggled with access to land, they do not face all or the degree of struggles that *Campesinas* face.

By striving toward this identity, as something to be valued, they join the movement to reclaim this identity and therefore act in solidarity with those who are persecuted for their peasant identity. Acting from a place of privilege, *striving toward* this identity works to change the discourse around the peasant identity and value the ways of living it represents. Hence, they hold up a peasant identity tentatively, with the purpose of revaluing the ways of living that it embodies. This includes valuing a less extractive more harmonious relationship to the earth and the non-economic wealth that comes from this relationship to land and community (Graciele Seibert, 2017). In striving toward this identity, the farmer authors see themselves as part of the global movement to reclaim the peasant identity as a positive signifier of collective knowledge and power to produce food and build community. In this way they join in coalition with peasants in the NFU who identified as peasants before them, as well as peasants in the global South who have always identified as peasants. While striving toward the peasant identity authors continue to

identify as farmers. In this way they challenge and push to renew discourses of what it means to be a farmer in Canada.

Identifying shared struggles and exclusion

Farmer authors' experiences with PPFem exposed and forced them to interrogate gendered, extractivist language and practices of agriculture in Canada. Answering the call to develop regionally situated conceptions of PPFem that emerge from the ground up (Graciele Seibert, 2017), we identify and discuss how patriarchy manifests itself in our region and how it constructs the farmer identity in Canada as male gendered. PPFem helped farmer authors understand how they were being excluded by the farmer identity. This created a push toward the peasant identity. We discussed how, within discourse and social practices in Canada, women's farm labour is not recognized, and women farmer identities are often erased. Sproule shared: "Recently, I saw an article featuring a farm I had spent a long time working on. My mentor was identified in a photo caption as 'his wife' after the name of the male farmer. [laughter] I laugh because it seems ridiculous, but unfortunately, this unconscious bias still exists. Men are the face of the farm, even though the women are the backbone. It was so frustrating to see that caption; that farm would fall apart without her." This erasure of women's work in farming echoes PPFem's identification of how women are considered assistants in production rather than integral to it (Graciele Seibert, 2017). In Canada, persistent narratives of farmers as male heads of households have subjected women to the position of farmers' wives, rather than farmers themselves.

Influenced by PtPP and PPFem's call to value peasant agriculture over forms of agriculture that are focused on extraction and profit (Graciele Seibert, 2017), farmer authors began to question growing trends within the fringe movement of small-scale ecological farming in North America that they call the "rock star farmer" model. This approach promotes the idea that a system developed by one person can be universally applied to achieve success anywhere. Richan explained, "They promote extracting as much value as possible out of a small piece of land and they focus on a few high value crops to survive." Because of their exposure to PtPP, farmer authors identified these models as didactic, formulaic, and colonial. Richan explained that unlike peasant models, these models are missing relationships with land. While they do encourage ecological farming, these models fail to challenge problematic discourses of value extraction for profit. Fenton also noted that within the "rock star farmer" trend: "It is mostly white men who are writing these books and going on speaking tours about their 'silver bullet formula,' while their partners, often women,¹⁶ stay at home and kept the farm going. We continue to hold up white men running profitable, productivist/extractivist farm businesses as the 'ideal' to strive towards." Here we emphasize how gendered aspects of the farmer identity in

¹⁶ We also recognize the heteronormative nature of the "family farm" narrative in Canada.

Canada intertwine with extractive narratives and are held up as models to duplicate toward success.

Farmer authors shared that identifying as farmers has been a struggle. Their identification has been questioned by others when, for example, their farm businesses were not in operation, or they were not employed in farm work. Sproule gave an example: “I was questioned by others because I am not a registered farm business.... Even though, I continue to grow food on various scales and raise animals to feed my family, during periods when my farm business is not running, I have felt self-conscious about whether or not I have the right to identify as a farmer...having my farm business running and gaining capital for myself is what I need to say confidently that I am a farmer.”

Sproule identifies the dominant discourse defining farmer identity as entrepreneur. Richan added, “I have always felt like an imposter, never truly feeling like I was a ‘real’ farmer because I had to work jobs off the farm in order to afford to farm.” Richan’s comment shows how farmer identity can exclude those who work off-farm out of economic necessity. This illustrates the subject position of farmer in Canada as couched within the discourse of capitalist production and tied to discourses of productivity, entrepreneurship, and profit. Sproule also recognized her continued vulnerability to these discourses, “Sometimes I will find myself saying, ‘I am getting back into farming’, but actually I have been doing it the whole time, I just haven’t been making money from it.”

Finding the subject position of farmer to be exclusionary, difficult, and partially undesirable, farmer authors were pushed away from the farmer identity that excludes them and toward a peasant identity. Farmer authors' move towards peasant identity recognizes how it enables certain kinds of knowledge and action not possible from other subject positions. The peasant identity allows these women to produce food without making a profit. It creates a sense of belonging to a community and includes pluriactivity as a part of the peasant lifestyle. Richan shared: “After farming and learning about what it means to be a peasant, it feels more accurate to strive for the peasant identity than the farmer identity. I don’t own land; I don’t make a profit from my agricultural work.” As they learned through PtPP and reflected on their own practice, the peasant identity began to resonate with their lived realities more than the farmer identity.

Enacting alternatives

Identifying as a peasant is an explicitly anti-capitalist orientation, which contrasts with the model we operate within in Canada. Working within a capitalist paradigm creates contradictions between actions born out of necessity of survival within this system, and actions meant to build alternatives in spite of it. As Vibert et al. (2022, this issue) explain, “everyday acts of worldmaking and resistance are vital to defending and renewing the place-based knowledge and practice that forms the ground for structural transformation” (p. 13). Farmer authors see peasant farming as a way to enact their values toward building alternative futures. Fenton explained “I

was looking for a way to live that reflected my values, but also sustained me economically, but in a way that didn't contribute to the destruction of the planet." As Desmarais (2008) explains, LVC is a "transnational movement defined by place" in which actors use "connections among themselves thus forged to reinforce their identity, through the use of a constant referent: the routine of their everyday lives grounded in planting and harvesting" (p. 141). These actions are used to "imagine and to present an alternative present and future: an alternative modernity" (Desmarais, 2008, p. 141). In other words, actions in farming ground and reaffirm the collective peasant identity and form the foundation for structural transformation. While enacting peasant farming in the Canadian context, farmer authors reaffirm their "peasantness" essential to their membership in the collective peasant identity.

We discussed how moments in the global South helped farmer authors challenge how they were enacting their values through their practices and how easy it is to fall back into entrepreneurial models of farming. For example, Richan shared a memory from Cuba where she realized how entrenched she was in the entrepreneurial/capitalist thinking in her farming practices, "I remember a moment, at the farmers' market, the vegetables for sale were unwashed and ugly!" She realized then that she had been exhausting herself, "trying to compete with grocery store standards...[and] being held to those standards of having perfectly washed and graded vegetables, with strict packaging, labelling, and presentation expectations." For her, those "dirty vegetables...opened the possibility of passing on some of the processing labour to customers." The ways in which farmer authors changed their approach to farming, constitutes daily acts of resistance to the capitalist system they live within.

The alternative culture of modernity, forged by peasant farming is one that does not assume that all food producers will enter the market and be guided by its logic (McMichael, 2006; van der Ploeg, 2010). Fenton explains, "if the goal of farming is profit, farmers spend more time on efficiencies and less time on investing in the land and community." By participating less in the market economy, developing more autonomy from the market, and creating networks of support in local communities, we see farming as more sustainable, economically, and ecologically. We spoke about how, currently, in many parts of rural Canada, there are no local options for consumers to take their money out of the capitalist system. This is where farmer authors see their role in recreating community. Farmers' markets and community supported agriculture became their way to create community by connecting with others through food. Richan explains: "I made a conscious choice to grow food as a way to create community. I mean that feeding my community is the goal of growing food, making money is not the primary motive guiding my choices." Fenton added "Yes, growing food is actually the tool I want to use to recreate community, but also to feed myself...the land supports you. When you give labour, it gives back, it sustains you. Farming is a lifestyle not a job."

This desire to create community applies not just to human community, but also to finding connections with the land. For Richan, agroecology is importantly reciprocal with land: "It is a way to put energy into something that gives back. You put in your labour and you see things grow." Peasant agriculture allows for development of non-commodity relationships with land

and community that authors had not previously considered. The peasant way involves building co-dependence in communities where community members support the building of food sovereignty. Fenton offered that everyone in Canada would need to be a part of building these alternatives ways of thinking about land and community, “This vision recognizes agroecology as a lifestyle, where farmers and consumers are buying into health of the local environment, landscape, and the atmosphere, and recognize this as their health as well. Rather than health being a product that they buy at the store, or at the gym, what would happen if community members took their money out of the capitalist system, rejected consumerism, and began investing time, energy, and money into local land?”

Farmer authors spoke about several alternative models of community supported agriculture (CSA) they had learned through their involvement in the NFU and LVC. They spoke about alternative models for regional farmers’ market governance and pricing, as well as co-operative farming and land trusts. They spoke of one model wherein bartering was used rather than money, and another model that involved CSA members in collaborative decisions around food prices and farmer salary. Richan shared how she now often barter the food she grows for other goods and services. For example, she traded a weekly CSA share for a home cooked meal at her neighbours’ house on very busy delivery days. Although these ideas may not be new to some readers, the point we make here is that it is *because* of farmer authors’ experiences in PtPP that they were exposed to different ways of farming than they had encountered in Canadian discourse. This sparked a change in their practices that collectively work to building alternatives in the Canadian context. While farmer authors continue to navigate how to enact peasant agriculture in the Canadian context, their relationships with others in the collective peasant identity reinforces this goal and acts as motivation to continue farming. Fenton explains, “I don't think that I ever would have developed this level of political consciousness...if I hadn't been given that early opportunity to engage with LVC. I probably would not even still be farming now, ten years later.”

Conclusions

This research explored how three young women, first generation farmers, from the global North came to strive toward a peasant identity and thus join the global peasant movement. We highlighted how their move toward a peasant identity was facilitated by PtPP through *Diálogo de saberes*. Encounters with diverse experiences and ways of knowing led to moments of dissonance that uncovered and challenged implicit assumptions. We identified in-person dialogue, collective organizing and informal socializing at events organized by LVC as important in forming relationships of care and collective struggle with peasants based on their shared humanity. These elements were also crucial in connecting farmers’ actions to the struggles of other actors in the food movement and spurring a recognition that growing organic

food for rich people wasn't enough. This is an example of how PtPP can radicalize progressive actors in the food movement.

Their encounters with PPFem and relationships with peasant women were powerful in attracting them to the peasant identity and way of life. Although they recognize their relative privilege when compared to *Campesinas*, they act in solidarity with them by holding up the peasant identity as the ideal to strive toward. PPFem helped them understand agroecology through a feminist lens and to identify their exclusion from a gendered capitalistic farming identity in their own region. This exclusion created a further pull towards the peasant identity. Farmer authors' move toward peasant identity recognizes how it enables certain kinds of knowledge and action not possible from other subject positions. The peasant identity allows these women to produce food as a way to build community. We have demonstrated that for farmers in the global North, PtPP can expand conceptions of possible modes of production and ways of living and influence how they understand themselves in relation to land. This influences how they enact agroecology and food sovereignty through their farming practice.

We see PtPP as a powerful tool that can and is being used to build understanding and alliances between various food movements. *Diálogo de saberes* among actors in food movements can be powerful in promoting shared understanding needed to build solidarity. For example, Fenton's experiences in encounters with migrant farm workers was transformational in her understanding of how her actions were linked to their struggles. As Klassen et al. (2022, this issue) explain, bringing members of migrant farm worker organizations in direct communication with organic farmer associations was successful, if partially, in creating empathy for farm worker struggles. The pedagogies of PtPP, specifically their emphasis on relationships, dialogue, and collective action, show potential for building strategic alliances between organic farming movements and migrant worker movements.

Toward the goal of building alliances between progressive and radical trends in food movements, we see value in building more opportunities for farmers to engage in PtPP with peasants internationally. Based on the experiences of the farmer authors, PtPP have allowed them to better negotiate and act to resist patriarchal and capitalistic discourses of farming in Canada. These experiences have helped them to understand how to act in solidarity with global peasant movements and have given them a sense of belonging to a collective struggle.

Acknowledgements: Our gratitude to our peers in the global South for sharing their knowledge, experience, and friendship with us. We thank the guest editors and other authors of this special issue for their helpful feedback and suggestions on early versions of this paper. We also thank the peer reviewers for their valuable comments.

References

- Altieri, M. A. (2009). Agroecology, small farms, and food sovereignty. *Monthly Review*, 61, 102–113. <http://safsc.org.za/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/Agroecology-small-farms-and-food-sovereignty.pdf>
- Astier, M., Argueta, J. Q., Orozco-Ramírez, Q., González, M. V., Morales, J., Gerritsen, P. R. W., Escalona M.A., Rosado-May, F. J., Sánchez-Escudero, J., Martínez Saldaña T., Sánchez-Sánchez C., Barrera, R. A., Castrejón, F., Morales, H., Soto, L., Mariaca, R., Ferguson, B., Rosset, P., Ramírez, H., ... González-Esquivel, C. (2017). Back to the roots: Understanding current agroecological movement, science, and practice in México. *Agroecology and Sustainable Food Systems*, 41, 329–348. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/21683565.2017.1287809>
- Butler, J. (1992). Contingent foundations: Feminism and the question of “postmodernism.” In J. Butler & J. W. Scott (Eds.), *Feminists theorize the political* (pp. 3–21). Routledge.
- Butler, J. (1995). For a careful reading. In S. Benhabib, J. Butler, D. Cornell & N. Fraser, *Feminist contentions: A philosophical exchange* (pp. 127–143). Routledge.
- Carastathis, A. (2013). Identity categories as potential coalitions. *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, 38(4), 941-965. <https://doi.org/10.1086/669573>
- Crenshaw, K. (1990). Mapping the margins: Intersectionality, identity politics, and violence against women of color. *Stanford Law Review*, 43(6), 1241-1299.
- Civil Society and Indigenous Peoples’ Mechanism (CSM) (2019). *Without feminism there is no agroecology: Towards healthy, sustainable, and just food systems* (T. Maisano, Ed.). Relations with The UN Committee on World Food Security (CFS). https://www.csm4cfs.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/CSM-Agroecology-and-Feminism-September-2019_compressed.pdf
- Conway, J. M. (2017). Troubling transnational feminism (s): Theorising activist praxis. *Feminist Theory*, 18(2), 205-227.
- Desmarais, A. A. (2008). The power of peasants: Reflections on the meanings of La Vía Campesina. *Journal of Rural Studies*, 24(2), 138-149. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jrurstud.2007.12.002>
- Edelman, M. (2013, July 15-19). *What is a peasant? What are peasantries? A briefing paper on issues of definition*. First session of the Intergovernmental Working Group on a United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Peasants and Other People Working in Rural Areas, Geneva. <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/Documents/HRBodies/HRCouncil/WGPleasants/Edelman.pdf>
- Gliessman, S. (2015). *Agroecology: the ecology of sustainable food systems (3rd ed.)*. Routledge.
- Graciele Seibert, I. (2017). Feminismo campesino popular: una propuesta de las campesinas de latinoamérica. *Soberanía alimentaria, biodiversidad y culturas*, 29, 6-9.

- Holt-Giménez, E., & Shattuck, A. (2011). Food crises, food regimes and food movements: rumblings of reform or tides of transformation? *The Journal of Peasant Studies*, 38(1), 109–144. <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/03066150.2010.538578>
- Klassen, S., Migrante, F., & Wittman, H. (2022). Sharing the struggle for fairness: exploring the possibilities for solidarity & just labour in organic agriculture. *Canadian Food Studies / La Revue Canadienne des études sur l'alimentation* 9(2), 147-179. <https://doi.org/10.15353/cfs-rcea.v9i2.536>
- Laforge, J., Fenton, A., Lavalée-Picard, V., & McLachlan, S. (2018). New farmers and food policies in Canada. *Canadian Food Studies/La Revue canadienne des études sur l'alimentation*, 5(3), 128-152. <https://doi.org/10.15353/cfs-rcea.v5i3.288>
- Martínez Torres, M. E., & Rosset, P. M. (2010). La Vía Campesina: The birth and evolution of a transnational social movement. *The Journal of Peasant Studies*, 37(1):149–75. doi:10.1080/03066150903498804.
- Martínez-Torres, M. E., & Rosset, P. M. (2014). Diálogo de saberes in La Vía Campesina: food sovereignty and agroecology. *Journal of Peasant Studies*, 41(6), 979-997. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03066150.2013.872632>
- McMichael, P. (2006). Peasant prospects in the neoliberal age. *New Political Economy*, 11(3), 407–418. DOI: 10.1080=13563460600841041
- Motta, R. (2021). Feminist Solidarities and Coalitional Identity: The Popular Feminism of the Marcha das Margaridas. *Latin American Perspectives*, 48(5), 25-41. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0094582X211017896>
- Movimento dos Trabalhadores Rurales Sem Terra (MST). (2020, March) MST's First National Gathering of Landless Women. Reflections from the International Delegation. Internal Document
- National Farmers Union (NFU). (2021). *NFU Statement on the international day of peasant struggle: Food sovereignty in Canada*. La Via Campesina. <https://viacampesina.org/en/nfu-statement-on-the-international-day-of-peasant-struggle-food-sovereignty-in-canada/>
- Pena, M. (2017). Hacia una voz propia y feminista en el movimiento campesino de Santiago del Estero. *Investigaciones Feministas*, 8(1), 245-266. <https://doi.org/10.5209/INFE.53907>
- Rosset, P., Val, V., Pinheiro Barbosa, L., & McCune, N. (2019). Agroecology and La Via Campesina II: Peasant agroecology schools and the formation of a sociohistorical and political subject. *Agroecology and Sustainable Food Systems*, 43(7-8), 895-914. <https://doi.org/10.1080/21683565.2019.1617222>
- Spivak, G. C. (1993). *Outside in the teaching machine*. Routledge
- Statistics Canada (2017). *Cropland in Ontario grows despite fewer farms*. Catalogue no. 95-640-X. https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/en/pub/95-640-x/2016001/article/14805-eng.pdf?st=9tLHI0p_
- St. Pierre, E. A., (2000). Poststructural feminism in education: An overview. *Qualitative Studies in Education*, 13(5), 477–515. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09518390050156422>

- Trevilla Espinal, D. L., Soto Pinto, M. L., Morales, H., & Estrada-Lugo, E. I. J. (2021). Feminist agroecology: Analyzing power relationships in food systems. *Agroecology and Sustainable Food Systems*, 45(7), 1029-1049. <https://doi.org/10.1080/21683565.2021.1888842>
- Val, V., Rosset, P. M., Zamora Lomelí, C., Giraldo, O. F., & Rocheleau, D. (2019). Agroecology and La Via Campesina I: The symbolic and material construction of agroecology through the dispositive of “peasant-to-peasant” processes. *Agroecology and Sustainable Food Systems*, 43(7-8), 872-894. <https://doi.org/10.1080/21683565.2019.1600099>
- van der Ploeg, J. D. (2010). The peasantries of the twenty-first century: the commoditization debate revisited. *The Journal of Peasant Studies*, 37(1), 1–30. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03066150903498721>
- van der Ploeg, J. D. (2012). The drivers of change: The role of peasants in the creation of an agro-ecological agriculture. *Agroecology*, 6, 47-54. <https://revistas.um.es/agroecologia/article/view/160661>
- van der Ploeg, J. D. (2014). Peasant-driven agricultural growth and food sovereignty. *The Journal of Peasant Studies*, 41(6), 999-1030. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03066150.2013.876997>
- Vibert, E., Gill, B., Murphy, M., Pérez Piñánd, A., & Puerta Silva, C. (2022). Transformation or the next meal? Global-local tensions in food justice work *Canadian Food Studies / La Revue Canadienne des études sur l'alimentation* 9(2), 226-248. <https://doi.org/10.15353/cfs-rcea.v9i2.531>
- Weedon, C. (1987). *Feminist practice and poststructuralist theory*. Basil Blackwell.



Original Research Article

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

Elizabeth Vibert^{a*}, Bikrum Singh Gill^b, Matt Murphy^a, Astrid Pérez Piñán^a, Claudia Puerta Silva^c

^aUniversity of Victoria

^bVirginia Tech

^c Universidad de Antioquia

Abstract

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

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

*Corresponding author: evibert@uvic.ca

DOI: 10.15353/cfs-rcea.v9i2.531

ISSN: 2292-3071

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

“Our soil is completely dead.” Josephine Mathebula

Introduction

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

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

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

Theory and methodology

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Table 1: Workshop participants

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

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

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

Conversations about food systems

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

Local and global: Juxtapositions and synergies

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

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

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

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

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

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

FATIMA: Every land has its own seed.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Challenging the extractive economy and industrial agriculture

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Defining roles of climate and place

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Discussion

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

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

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

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

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

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

Conclusion

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

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

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

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

Acknowledgements: This research is supported by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada. We are grateful to T’Sou-ke Nation for graciously hosting and sharing with us; to our brilliant community partners; to interpreters Basani Ngobeni, Salam Guenette, and Tobi Panter; and to Bruno Jayme, Theresa Mackay, and Darren Reid, for their many skills that helped to make this workshop possible. Thank you to the anonymous reviewers and issue co-editors for helpful suggestions.

References

- Acosta, A. (2013). Extractivism and neo-extractivism: Two sides of the same curse. In M. Lang & D. Mokrani (Eds.), *Beyond development: Alternative visions from Latin America* (pp. 61-85). Transnational Institute/Rosa Luxemburg Foundation.
- Aliber, M., & Hall, R. (2012). Support for smallholder farmers in South Africa: Challenges of scale and strategy. *Development Southern Africa*, 29(4), 548–562.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/0376835X.2012.715441>
- Altieri, M., & Nicholls, C. (2020). Agroecology and the reconstruction of a post-COVID-19 agriculture. *Journal of Peasant Studies*, 47(5), 881-898.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/03066150.2020.1782891>
- Bernstein, H. (2014). Food sovereignty via the peasant way: A sceptical view. *Journal of Peasant Studies*, 41(6), 1031-1063. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03066150.2013.852082>
- Busse, J. (2022, February). Everyday life in the face of conflict: *Sumud* as a spatial quotidian practice in Palestine. *Journal of International Relations and Development*, 1-25.
<https://doi.org/10.1057/s41268-022-00255-1>
- Cahill, C. (2010). ‘Why do they hate us?’ Reframing immigration through participatory action research. *Area*, 42(2), 152-161. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1475-4762.2009.00929.x>
- Clapp, J., & Moseley, W. (2020). This food crisis is different: COVID-19 and the fragility of the neoliberal food security order. *Journal of Peasant Studies*, 47(7), 1393-1417.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/03066150.2020.1823838>
- Corntassel, J., & Bryce, C. (2012). Practicing sustainable self-determination: Indigenous approaches to cultural restoration and revitalization. *Brown Journal of World Affairs*, 18(2), 151-162.
- Coulthard, G. (2014). *Red skin, white masks: Rejecting the colonial politics of recognition*. University of Minnesota Press.
- Coulthard, G. (2017, February). From recognition to decolonization: An interview with Glen Coulthard. *Upping the Anti: A Journal of Theory and Action*, 19.
<https://uppingtheanti.org/journal/article/19-from-recognition-to-decolonization>
- Fraser, N. (2005, November/December). Reframing justice in a globalizing world. *New Left Review*, 36.
- Fraser, N. (2009). *Scales of justice: Reimagining political space in a globalizing world*. Columbia University Press.
- Getachew, A. (2019). *Worldmaking after Empire: The rise and fall of self-determination*. Princeton University Press.
- Gibson-Graham, J. K., & Cameron, J. (2007). Community enterprises: Imagining and enacting alternatives to capitalism. *Social Alternatives*, 26(1), 20-25.
- Gilpin, E., & Hayes, M. (2020). A collection of voices: Land-based leadership, community wellness, and food knowledge revitalization of the W̱O̱Ł̱E̱Ł̱P Tsartlip First Nation Garden

- Project. In P. Settee & S. Shukla (Eds.), *Indigenous food systems: Concepts, cases, and conversations* (pp.101-118). Canadian Scholars.
- Habib, S. (2022). Opportunity in crisis: shifting public will to transform food systems. *Canadian Food Studies / La Revue Canadienne des études sur l'alimentation* 9(2), 64-74.
<https://doi.org/10.15353/cfs-rcea.v9i2.538>
- Hackett, R. (2020, November 20). *Decolonizing and racing research: Critical perspectives on research with racialized communities* [Webinar series]. Community-Based Research with Racialized Communities, Community-Based Research Canada.
- Hazou, R. T. (2013). Encounters in the Aida refugee camp in Palestine. In M. Balfour (Ed.), *Refugee performance: Practical encounters* (pp. 129-156). Chicago University Press.
- Holt-Giménez, E. (2006). *Campesino a campesino: Voices from Latin America's farmer to farmer movement for sustainable agriculture*. Food First Books.
- Holt-Giménez, E. & Shattuck, A. (2011). Food crises, food regimes and food movements: rumblings of reform or tides of transformation?, *The Journal of Peasant Studies*, 38(1), 109-144, DOI: [10.1080/03066150.2010.538578](https://doi.org/10.1080/03066150.2010.538578)
- Johansson, A., & Vinthagen, S. (2020). *Conceptualizing 'everyday resistance': A transdisciplinary approach*. Routledge.
- Kerr, R., Richan, E., Fenton, A., & Sproule, C. (2022). Striving toward a peasant identity: The influence of the global peasant movement on three women farmers in Canada. *Canadian Food Studies / La Revue Canadienne des études sur l'alimentation* 9(2), 205-225.
<https://doi.org/10.15353/cfs-rcea.v9i2.535>
- Kindon, S., Pain, R., & Kesby, M. (2010). Introduction: Connecting people, participation, and place. In S. Kindon, R. Pain, & M. Kesby (Eds.), *Participatory action research approaches and methods: Connecting people, participation, and place* (pp. 1-5). Routledge.
<https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203933671>
- Levkoe, C., Hammelman, C., Reynolds, K., Brown, X., Jahi Chappell, M., Salvador, R., & Wheeler, B. (2020). Scholar-activist perspectives on radical food geography: Collaborating through food justice and food sovereignty praxis. *Human Geography*, 13(3), 293-304.
<https://doi.org/10.1177%2F1942778620962036>
- Logan, A., & Dores Cruz, M. (2014). Gendered taskscapes: Food, farming, and craft production in Banda, Ghana. *African Archaeological Review*, 31(2), 203-231.
<https://doi.org/10.1007/s10437-014-9155-6>
- Marie, M., Hannigan, B., & Jones, A. (2018). Social ecology of resilience and Sumud of Palestinians. *Health*, 22(1), 20-35. <https://doi.org/10.1177%2F1363459316677624>
- McInnes, A., & Mount, P. (2016). Actualizing sustainable food systems. In M. Koc, J. Sumner, & A. Winson (Eds.), *Critical perspectives in food studies* (2nd ed., pp. 332-347). Oxford University Press.
- Moore, H., & Vaughan, M. (1993). *Cutting down trees: Gender, nutrition, and agricultural change in the Northern Province of Zambia, 1890-1990*. Heinemann.

- Morrison, D. (2020). Reflections and realities: Expressions of food sovereignty in the Fourth World. In P. Settee & S. Shukla (Eds.), *Indigenous food systems: Concepts, cases, and conversations* (pp. 17-38). Canadian Scholars.
- Narayan, J. (2020). Survival pending revolution: Self-determination in the age of proto-neoliberal globalization. *Current Sociology*, 68(2), 187-203.
- Nassar, M. (2019). Palestinian engagements with the Black Freedom Struggle before 1967. *Journal of Palestine Studies*, 48(4), 17-32.
- Nyéleni. (2007, February 27). *Declaration of Nyéleni*. Nyéleni – Via Campesina. <https://nyeleni.org/spip.php?article290>
- Pérez Piñán, A., & Vibert, E. (2019). The view from the farm: Gendered contradictions of the measurement imperative in global goals. *Journal of Human Development and Capabilities*, 20(4), 436-50. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19452829.2019.1659237>
- Phillips, L., Kristiansen, M., Vehviläinen, M., & Gunnarsson, E. (Eds.). (2013). *Knowledge and power in collaborative research: A reflexive approach*. Routledge.
- Poppendieck, J. (2022). Reformist, progressive, radical: The case for an inclusive alliance. *Canadian Food Studies / La Revue Canadienne des études sur l'alimentation* 9(2), 53-63. <https://doi.org/10.15353/cfs-rcea.v9i2.534>
- Prato, S. (2017). Facilitating corporate capture or investing in small-scale sustainable agriculture and agroecology? In *Spotlight on sustainable development 2017: Reclaiming policies for the public* (pp. 40–48). Civil Society Reflection Group on the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.
- Richards, P. (1985). *Indigenous agricultural revolution: Ecology and food crops in West Africa*. Methuen Publishing.
- Richter-Devroe, S. (2018). *Women's Political Activism in Palestine: Peacebuilding, Resistance, and Survival*, 97-132. University of Illinois Press.
- Sa'di, A., & Abu-Lughod, L. (Eds.). (2007). *Nakba: Palestine, 1948, and the claims of memory*. Columbia University Press.
- Settee, P. & Shukla, S., (Eds.) (2020). *Indigenous food systems: Concepts, cases, and conversations*. Canadian Scholars.
- Sharqawi, F. (2021). Palestinians rising: From Jerusalem to Umm al-Fahm. In *Occupied Thoughts* [Audio podcast]. Foundation for Middle East Peace. https://soundcloud.com/fmep_pod
- Simpson, A. (2014). *Mohawk interruptus: Political life across the border of settler states*. Duke University Press.
- Simpson, L. (2011). *Dancing on our turtle's back*. Arbeiter Ring Publishing.
- Simpson, L. (2017). *As we have always done: Indigenous freedom through radical resistance*. University of Minnesota Press.

- Snyder, E., Napoleon, V., & Borrows, J. (2015). Gender and violence: Drawing on Indigenous legal resources. *UBC Law Review*, 48(2), 541-592.
- Susman, G. I., & Evered, R. D. (1978). An assessment of the scientific merits of action research. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 23(4), 582-603. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2392581>
- Van Der Ploeg, J. (2020). From biomedical to politico-economic crisis: The food system in times of Covid-19. *Journal of Peasant Studies*, 47(5), 944-972. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03066150.2020.1794843>
- Walker, M., & Mathebula, M. (2020). A participatory photovoice project: Towards capability expansion of 'invisible' students in South Africa. In M. Walker & A. Boni (Eds.), *Participatory research, capabilities and epistemic justice: A transformative agenda for higher education* (pp. 189-213). Palgrave Macmillan.
- Whetung, M. (2016). *Nishnaabeg encounters: Living Indigenous landscapes* [Unpublished master's thesis]. University of Toronto.
- Whyte, K. (2017). Our ancestors' dystopia now: Indigenous conservation and the Anthropocene. In J. Christensen, M. Niemann, & U. Heise (Eds.), *Routledge Companion to the Environmental Humanities* (1st ed., pp. 207-215). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315766355>
- Whyte, K. (2018). Indigenous science (fiction) for the Anthropocene: Ancestral dystopias and fantasies of climate change crises. *Environment and Planning E: Nature and Space*, 1(1-2), 224-242. <https://doi.org/10.1177%2F2514848618777621>
- Whyte, K. (2020). Too late for indigenous climate justice: Ecological and relational tipping points. *WIREs Climate Change*, 11(1). <https://doi.org/10.1002/wcc.603>
- Williams, L. R. T., & Henare, M. (2009). The double spiral and ways of knowing. *MAI Review*, 3, 1-9.



Review Article

Breadlines, victory gardens, or human rights?: Examining food insecurity discourses in Canada

Audrey Tung*, Reuben Rose-Redwood and Denise Cloutier

University of Victoria

Abstract

Long before the exacerbating effects of COVID-19, household food insecurity (HFI) has been a persistent yet hidden problem in wealthy nations such as Canada, where it has been perpetuated in part through dominant discourses and practices. In this critique of HFI-related frameworks, we suggest that discourses organized around the production and (re)distribution of food, rather than income inequality, have misdirected household food insecurity reduction activities away from the central issue of poverty, even inadvertently enabling the ongoing neoliberal “rollback” of safety net functions. Unlike most scholarship that focuses on the politics of food systems, or health research that insufficiently politicizes poverty, this analysis emphasizes the role of politics in income discourses. In spite of their contradictions, food-provisioning and income-based discourses are potentially complementary in their shared recognition of the right to food. Operating from the perspective of political economic theory, we conceive of the right to food as a claim not only to a resource but also to membership within political communities that envision alternatives to neoliberalism as manifested in our labour, welfare, and food systems. In this sense, the right to food offers a unifying framework that links civil society with senior governments, collective action with legal instruments, and food and income concerns. HFI reduction activities organized around the right to food may thus aim to rectify cross-cutting imbalances in political and economic power.

Keywords: Human rights; household food insecurity; social policy; welfare state

*Corresponding author: audreytung@uvic.ca

DOI: 10.15353/cfs-rcea.v9i2.530

ISSN: 2292-3071

Introduction

During exceptional times, we tend to rely on familiar narratives to reckon with uncertainty and injustice: to lend predictability to precarity; collectivity to isolation; heroism to the mundane; and generosity to want. In the COVID-19 pandemic, consider the wartime rhetoric of the “fight against COVID-19” and its attendant social symptoms, a popular one being the “fight against hunger” commonly invoked in charitable campaigns. While there is certainly merit in appealing to a sense of shared civic duty, these narratives fall short of indicting the institutions that have failed to uphold obligations to social wellbeing, nor do they address inequitable social outcomes such as food scarcity in wealthy nations.

War metaphors are reductive in their polarity—intentionally so. In the public eye, on banners at checkouts, in posts on social media, and in headlines in the news, supermarkets have been triumphantly donating to those in need, supposedly in service of “ending hunger.” Yet those same grocery chains, including Loblaws and Walmart, have quietly rolled back wage bonuses to their essential workers (CBC News, 2020a), many of whom cannot afford sufficient food among other basic necessities, and had been unable to do so long before COVID-19. This is a prominent strategy through which language has been used to conceal food scarcity and construct false solutions to it not only at present, but over several decades of welfare retrenchment.

This article examines dominant narratives surrounding the condition of household food insecurity (HFI), defined in a North American context as “the inadequate or insecure access to sufficient food because of financial constraints” (Dachner & Tarasuk, 2018, p. 231). We use “household food insecurity” interchangeably with “food insecurity” because financial circumstances represent the main barrier to food access for most Canadians—even though various frameworks responding to food scarcity, as we detail below, fail to reflect the centrality of income. In this sense, “food insecurity” does not necessarily represent a direct antonym to the umbrella term of “food security.” “Food security” is generally defined as the condition in which “all people, at all times, have physical and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food to meet their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life” (Food and Agriculture Organization [FAO], 1996). However, the literature in the food security field tends to emphasize the supply and distribution of food as opposed to economic access to food, which is the primary determinant of household food insecurity. This has been a point of tension and confusion that has arguably interfered with effective HFI reduction, as we will discuss later in this article.

Competing discourses

While the urgency of reducing HFI is widely accepted, the means of doing so are more contested. Due to the presence of vested interests and absence of discursive clarity, there are competing discursive representations of HFI as a “problem,” each of which propose different solutions (Midgley, 2012). These differences are important because language is not a neutral medium of representation, but a mechanism for constructing social realities (Foucault, 1972). The resultant realities are often built along underlying paradigms that follow the boundaries of professional training, intellectual conditioning, personal values, and ideological dispositions (Kuhn, 1970), the last of these being emphasized in the present study. Language therefore plays a crucial role in legitimizing or discrediting knowledge, and consolidating or undermining power, for HFI-reduction activities (Mendly-Zambo & Raphael, 2019).

In this article, we examine how the problem of HFI is differentially framed and responded to in various discourses putatively responding to the issue, and critique their utility, or lack thereof, in reducing HFI. Undertaken from a structural perspective, this analysis highlights the ways in which discourse reveals and conceals the systems that produce HFI. We draw attention to overlooked frameworks that emphasize the root cause of inadequate income, using these perspectives to critically question discourses that prioritize food system issues over those of poverty. In particular, we demonstrate the contribution of a Marxist political economy approach, which situates HFI within the wider political project of neoliberalism (Mendly-Zambo & Raphael, 2019). We then apply this political economy lens to another framework, the Right to Food, as a way of bridging existing disjuncture between income and food supply concerns (Rosol et al., this issue), as well as between governing institutions and civil society. Through this interpretation of the right to food, we seek to consolidate political action towards food that is sustainable, adequate, and affordable—qualities that ought to complement, rather than compromise, one another.

Household food insecurity discourses

In our analysis, we selected HFI discourses based on prevailing frameworks identified by Mendly-Zambo and Raphael (2019), loosely categorized as follows: income-based frameworks (including social determinants of health and political economy) and food-provisioning-based frameworks (including nutritionism, charitable food distribution, and the local food movement). Additional discourses that pervade or accompany both streams of frameworks include the “deserving/undeserving poor” and the right to food (Kirkpatrick & Tarasuk, 2009; Fisher, 2017; Riches, 2018). We have limited our discussion to the distribution, rather than production, of food, although the latter represents an equally critical branch of food justice. Responding to the current imperative for collaboration within, between, and beyond disparate food movements

(Rosol et al., this issue), we therefore recommend the right to food approach as a tool for linking HFI reduction to broader food systems change.

Income-based frameworks

Social determinants of health

By contrast to responses organized around the provision of food, income-based approaches directly address and foreground HFI's root cause of poverty. Chief among income-based HFI discourses is the Social Determinants of Health (SDH) framework, which recognizes that health outcomes are predominantly influenced by socioeconomic circumstances rather than lifestyle choices or community interventions (Raphael, 2016). It explicitly situates inequitable health outcomes within differential social locations, determinants of which include income, education, employment/unemployment, early childhood development, housing, social exclusion, social safety networks, health services, gender, race, disability, and food insecurity (Raphael, 2016). Since many of these markers are interrelated, food insecurity is itself determined by a number of the aforementioned factors, a primary predictor being income. As a result, the SDH literature frequently attributes food insecurity to public policies that have led to a lack of purchasing power for food (Raphael, 2016; McIntyre, 2003; McIntyre, et al., 2016a). To illustrate the inadequacy of social welfare in Canada, the average social assistance payments to a single employable adult in 2018 were a mere 47 percent of the Market Basket Measure (MBM), which defines “thresholds of poverty based upon the cost of a basket of food, clothing, shelter, transportation, and other items for individuals and families representing a modest, basic standard of living” (Heisz, 2019). In 2014, 60.9 percent of Canadian households whose predominant source of income was social assistance were food insecure, but HFI is a pervasive issue even for households reliant on employment income, which comprise 62.2 percent of the HFI population (Tarasuk et al., 2016). These statistics point to major inadequacies in both social welfare and employment wages.

Due to the strong association between household income and HFI, proposed solutions to HFI in SDH discourse focus on policy-based poverty reduction strategies. These include increases to social assistance rates, housing affordability, and the minimum wage, as well as reductions to childcare costs and the age of pension eligibility (McIntyre & Rondeau, 2009; Emery et al., 2013). As an alternative to piecemeal welfare policies and programs, SDH proponents have also advocated for a universal basic income that can reach all who are vulnerable to food insecurity on the basis of insufficient income (Tarasuk, 2017; McIntyre & Anderson, 2016; Power & McBay, this issue). The low rate of food insecurity among Canadian seniors is commonly cited as evidence for the protective effect of a guaranteed, stable, and increased income (Emery et al., 2013). According to basic income advocates, the logical course of policy action is to extend this benefit to all Canadians, regardless of age, below an income threshold (Tarasuk, 2017). By preventing diet-related diseases, costs to provincial governments

would partially be offset by reductions to healthcare expenditures (Tarasuk, 2017). However, critics argue that a universal basic income may be politically co-opted to entrench market rationalities and retrench existing social programs, particularly for vulnerable populations with diverse needs. In practice, policy decisions are at least as ideological as they are logical. Rather than appealing strictly to rationalism, as SDH discourse does, Mendly-Zambo and Raphael (2018) instead argue that policy advocacy should reflect the inherently political nature of policymaking. This is an underacknowledged consideration that is emphasized in the related framework of political economy.

Marxist political economy approach

Marxist political economy approaches situate social inequalities within structures of power embedded in networks of capitalist production (Mosco, 2009). While classical political economy concerned mathematical laws that governed the economy of the nation-state, Karl Marx's innovation was to link economic relationships with the exploitation of labour (Marx, 1859). Marxist political economy approaches have since expanded beyond issues of labour to encompass broader social relations that are organized around power, or the ability to control other people, processes, and things (Mosco, 2014). Researchers who emphasize the processual aspect of political economy tend to portray systems of economic injustice, including neoliberalism, as dynamic conditions rather than end states (Wilson, 2004). Processes of neoliberalization typically fall under two categories conceived by Peck and Tickell (2002): "rollbacks" to post-war welfare state protections, and "rollout" of institutions designed to perpetuate market logics by managing, most often by regulating (but never resolving) their social consequences.

In the present study, HFI represents a political economic product of "rollbacks" to public labour protections and social supports, as well as the "rollout" of charitable systems that have enabled corporate interests to overtake public programs. In this sense, we situate the structural contributions of SDH within the political project of neoliberalism to analyze power relations within and among corporate, public, and charitable sectors. SDH and political economy thus provide complementary analyses for examining HFI in countries with sufficient yet inequitably distributed socioeconomic resources, and deficient levels of political support, for resolving the issue.

For this study, the political economic product in question is not food as a material good, but HFI as a social condition. In industrialized nations, processes that produce food, the domain of the former, operate very differently from those which put food on the table, concerning the latter. Although Amartya Sen's (1985, 2001) work on the political economy of hunger focuses on the global South, his concept of one's "capability" to achieve wellbeing (e.g., through the ability to buy food), which is often enabled or encumbered by their sociopolitical environment, is consistent with our political economy approach. The majority of political economic analysis and

related frameworks concern food as a resource, which only tangentially relates to HFI in wealthy countries. Such analyses implicate the industrial food system, which is structured such that fruits and vegetables command higher prices than market-saturating processed foods, cereals, and junk foods (Dixon et al., 2007; Friel & Lichacz, 2010; Stuckler & Nestle, 2012; Stuckler et al., 2012). The relative accessibility of energy-rich but nutritionally inadequate food products has resulted in the proliferation of obesity, diabetes, and other diet-related diseases, which disproportionately affect low-income populations (Dixon et al., 2007; Friedmann, 2012). Although healthy foods are expensive compared to unhealthy foods, the overall price of food, including fruits and vegetables, has decreased significantly since the advent of industrial agriculture—albeit at the expense of producer livelihoods and environmental resources (Hazell, 2010).

In that sense, the industrial food system, notwithstanding its massive social and environmental consequences, has improved nutritional outcomes for many consumers, albeit unequally (Gómez et al., 2013). The prevalence of HFI today in spite of food affordability suggests that the limiting factor to adequate and healthy food is consumer income, which is the focus of the political economy of HFI, rather than cost, a subject of the political economy of food (Provincial Health Services Authority, 2016). In affluent and heavily urbanized countries such as Canada, household income and food production are largely separate issues. However, political economic literature about food in a global context (Friedmann, 2012; McMichael, 2009; Bernstein, 2016) tends to blur that distinction, partly because food production remains a major source of livelihoods in many regions of the global South, and poverty and malnutrition among food producers a major challenge. In the following section, we attribute the emergence of HFI in Canada, following a period of relative absence, to the growth of income inequality and decline of the welfare state in the 1980s (Power, 1999).

Given the inextricable link between income and food, we must first look to macro-scale processes that have produced the concomitant rise of income inequality, and consequently, food insecurity. Contrary to the capitalist myth of market self-regulation, widespread income inequality today is not a naturally occurring economic phenomenon, but the result of calculated and sustained political intervention. In other words, neoliberalism is just as much about regulation, that is to “roll out” state control in favour of the market, as it is about deregulation, which is to “roll back” welfare state functions and entitlements (Peck & Tickell, 2002, 2007; Rosol, 2010, 2012). Hence, it is crucial to note that inequality has not always been the status quo. Between World War II and the mid-1970s, income inequality in Canada declined in large part due to a robust Canadian social security system, which grew out of a recognition that structural forces responsible for poverty require macroeconomic state intervention (Procyk, 2014; Power, 1999). It is no coincidence that food banks were virtually nonexistent in Canadian society during this time; their subsequent proliferation indicates mounting corporate excesses and social deficiencies that have been artificially managed—in “rollout” neoliberal fashion—through charity since the 1980s (Tarasuk & Eakin, 2005). This rise of inequality, and therefore food insecurity, occurred when industrialized nations abandoned Keynesian economic principles, characterized by financial regulation and public spending, in favour of neoliberal “rollbacks” to

policies and programs that support basic financial, health, and social needs (Riches & Tarasuk, 2014).

At the federal level, welfare retrenchment was predominantly enacted through cuts to one of Canada's most important income security programs, Employment Insurance, as well as the abolition of the Canada Assistance Plan, which formerly obliged the federal government to pay for 50 percent of provincial costs for social programs (Riches & Tarasuk, 2014; Riches, 1997). The successor to the Canada Assistance Plan, the Canada Health, and Social Transfer, resulted in \$7 billion in cutbacks to provincial funding for health, education, and most importantly, welfare (Riches, 1997). By downloading social program expenditures and responsibilities to provinces and territories, which do not have comparable capacity for delivering social protections, the federal government further eliminated its obligation to uphold national welfare standards (Riches & Tarasuk, 2014). Beyond government authorities, we see food banks and community food programs as an extension of such subsidiarity, with governments further offloading social responsibilities onto communities and individuals. The devolution of social programs and services has been a focus of wide critique of neoliberalism in various contexts including community development and health (Ayo, 2010; Cheshire & Lawrence, 2005; MacCleod & Emejulu, 2014; McClintock, 2014).

Food-provisioning-based frameworks

Food charity

The predominant food-based response to HFI is charitable food assistance, which includes food banks, soup kitchens, and other feeding programs that redistribute excess food to vulnerable individuals. Food charity may play a role in provisional relief, but its institutional entrenchment has problematically contributed to the chronic nature of food insecurity in Canada. Contrary to the popular conception of food banks as emergency sources of aid, a growing body of evidence suggests that food bank utilization is in fact a long-term subsistence strategy for a large proportion of clients (Daponte et al., 1998; Kicinski, 2012; Holmes et al., 2018). The expansion of food banks across the country evinces not only widespread food insecurity, rates of which exceed the number of food bank users by a factor of 4.6 times (Loopstra & Tarasuk, 2015), but the institutionalization of the large-scale, warehouse food bank model we are familiar with today (Riches, 2018; Tarasuk et al., 2014; Riches & Tarasuk, 2014). Food Banks Canada currently runs over 644 food banks to serve more than 1 million individuals every month (Food Banks Canada, 2021). That food charity and food insecurity have become such normalized, acceptable conditions of wealthy countries is alarming: it points to a failing social safety net that food banks were not designed to compensate for and should never have to fulfill.

Critics following SDH and political economy approaches argue that food banks not only ignore, but also reinforce, the root causes of hunger (Riches & Tarasuk, 2014; Tarasuk et al., 2014; Fisher, 2017; Riches, 2018). They create the illusion that we are solving HFI while leaving intact structural problems—in this case, inadequate social policies, and programs. The public approval of food banks already requires some degree of doublethink: to support their existence uncritically, as popular media tends to do, is to be complacent to the unjust conditions that make them necessary. After all, benchmarks for food bank efficacy (e.g., meals served, amount of food donated) can be inversely interpreted as metrics of a broken social safety net. If the goal is to eliminate HFI, then the aim should be to make the demand for food banks obsolete (Fisher, 2017; Riches, 2018).

Food banks, along with their donors, often frame food redistribution as a “win-win” for people and the environment due to its twin outcomes of feeding people and diverting food waste (Lougheed & Spring, 2020). Similar to local food movement discourse (see below), food charity discourse problematically conflates environmental and social systems by constructing false synergies between them. In addition to their limited efficacy for reducing HFI, food banks may perversely encourage wasteful food production to sustain operations (Fisher, 2017; Riches, 2018). Riches (2018) highlights the absurdity of using the symptom of a wasteful food system to treat a malfunctioning social safety net, which only reinforces the deficiencies of both. The redistributive nature of food charity also means that the food is typically subpar in quality and attached to social stigma—essentially “leftover food for left behind people” (Riches, 2018, p. 2; Riches, 2011; Tarasuk & Eakin, 2005). In recent years, however, many food banks have attempted to increase the nutritional content of foods, along with the dignity with which they are accessed (Campbell et al., 2013). While these measures certainly improve food bank practices, they are confined to nutritional and/or community development considerations wherein anti-poverty advocacy is largely absent.

Nutritionism and behavioural approaches

Some discourses based on nutritionism, characterized by a focus on biophysical health outcomes in individuals, frame food insecurity as a matter of consumer choices, dispositions, and competencies (Labonte, 1993). Accordingly, behavioural approaches focus on promoting “food literacy” and “healthy lifestyle choices” through health education, skill development, and counselling (Mendly-Zambo & Raphael, 2019). Such strategies may enhance knowledge about food, but this is not a determinant of HFI. In a study of national data from the Canadian Community Health Survey (Huisken et al., 2016), adults in food insecure households did not report lower food preparation skills or cooking ability than those in food secure households, and neither variable predicted HFI when demographic characteristics were accounted for. This study makes clear that the capital in short supply is not food knowledge, but socioeconomic resources, notably money, time, and facilities for preparing food (Power, 2005; Raine, 2005).

In spite of these barriers, numerous studies have shown that low-income households already demonstrate immense resourcefulness in preparing food on a budget (Tarasuk, 2001; Douglas et al., 2015; Desjardins, 2013; Dachner et al., 2010; Engler-Stringer, 2011). Such findings call into question the suitability of nutrition initiatives designed for HFI reduction, many of which are predicated upon the condescending notion that food insecure individuals lack the motivation or skill to cook healthy foods. This stereotype is perpetuated by healthy eating proponents who fetishize the preparation of meals from scratch—an ideal that holds little relevance to HFI (McLaughlin et al., 2003; Fisher, 2017). McLaughlin et al. (2003), for instance, did not find an association between the frequency of meals prepared from scratch and the severity of HFI in a sample of women seeking charitable assistance. The effect of consumer choice on HFI is ultimately negligible in light of structural limitations to those choices.

By placing responsibility for dietary outcomes on the individual, albeit with periodic acknowledgements of financial constraints, the behavioural approach follows the neoliberal strategy of blaming the victim for their circumstances of poverty. By doing so it decontextualizes and depoliticizes food insecurity (Mendly-Zambo & Raphael, 2019). Based upon the nutritional framework to HFI, food insecurity tends to become a matter of nutritional imbalance rather than social inequality—a physiological, rather than political, pathology. Even if nutrition programs successfully produced behavioural changes, an outcome for which there is little evidence beyond modest and short-term improvements (Loopstra, 2018), they do not address various other social determinants of health in which HFI is embedded, the primary one being income. By contrast, nutritional discourses informed by SDH perspectives, such as those produced by Dietitians of Canada, frequently advocate for poverty reduction measures. However, governments, charitable organizations, and communities are inclined to ignore these recommendations in favour of politically “neutral” nutrition initiatives (Mendly-Zambo & Raphael, 2019).

Local food movement

Sometimes overlapping with nutritional programs are community-based initiatives belonging to the local food movement, including community kitchens, gardens, meals, and grocery distribution services. They typically span multiple objectives such as sustainability, community development, wellbeing, and food distribution—all of which may intersect, and inadvertently interfere, with HFI reduction. Although local food initiatives have traditionally catered to privileged social groups, many programs now aim to provide local, healthy foods to food insecure individuals (Heynen et al., 2012; Gottlieb & Fisher, 1996; Allen, 1999). That they are commonly presented as ethical antitheses to food banks is a claim that we support but also question.

However, we mainly direct this critique to initiatives that do not critically engage with poverty, recognizing that many networks of mutual aid already do—Habib (this issue) being a case in point. Much of this critical work is informed by frameworks such as community food

security and food sovereignty. Although their means often overlap with those of the local food movement, and can be co-opted in that regard, they are distinguished by their end goal of social justice, which includes economic access to food. Further, we cannot understate the significance of communities that facilitate dignified access to food if not at the population scale, then on a personal basis. As we will later argue, these are the very relationships through which we centre the “human” in rights.

In our view, the utility of community food initiatives lies in improving social inclusion, an essential element of collective action to be discussed later in this article. Nevertheless, a wide body of research suggests that community food programs are structurally limited in their capacity to alleviate material food deprivation (Kirkpatrick & Tarasuk, 2009; Tarasuk & Reynolds, 1999; Loopstra & Tarasuk, 2013; Raine et al., 2003; Tarasuk, 2001; Seed et al., 2014; Wong & Hallsworth, 2016). In a study of low-income families in Toronto, for instance, Kirkpatrick and Tarasuk (2009) found that community food programs failed to reach those who were most vulnerable and were not associated with increased household food security even among participants. There are several explanations for their inability to reduce HFI. First, program capacities are often constrained by insecure and/or insufficient resources such as funding, volunteers, and jurisdiction, particularly in underserved neighbourhoods (Loopstra & Tarasuk, 2013; Tarasuk, 2001). Second, program participation is limited by personal circumstances such as physical ability, time, money, and energy, which are often in short supply for target populations (Loopstra, 2018; Loopstra & Tarasuk, 2013; Kirkpatrick & Tarasuk, 2009). Therefore, community food programs paradoxically require a baseline level of livelihood stability that food-based activities can enrich, but never establish absent structural welfare supports. By retaining a focus on food, community initiatives—by definition—fail to address the underlying cause of HFI: poverty (Power, 1999; Tarasuk, 2001; Hamelin et al., 2011).

Even if they produce or provide adequate food at low or no cost, community food programs—existing precariously themselves—can never eliminate the uncertainty with which participants access food in the absence of real purchasing power. The conflation of food supply and inadequate income also highlights the importance of scale differentiation: while local food production may improve food security for the region or community, it does not necessarily percolate down to households which experience food insecurity for reasons largely external to the food system. Despite impacting dietary outcomes on an individual and irregular basis, community initiatives largely fail to match the pervasive and persistent scale of HFI. Counterintuitively, *household* food insecurity is a *population* health problem that generally demands public policy interventions (Tarasuk, 2017). These centralized solutions are prioritized within income-based frameworks, which are discussed later in this article.

Furthermore, the local food movement’s terms of empowerment—“autonomy,” “self-sufficiency,” and “agency” in food production—paradoxically overlap with neoliberal idioms of self-reliance, even as they portray communities that are ostensibly more equitable. The co-option of empowerment perpetuates a wider pattern of downloading social services to communities, and responsibility over household circumstances to individuals in neoliberal regimes (McClintock,

2014; Pudup, 2008). To illustrate, Rosol (2012, 2018) examines the contradictory ways in which urban gardening, originally conceived as a grassroots movement, both reinforces and resists neoliberalism. In her case study of community gardens in Berlin, the voluntary sector may have furthered the retrenchment of public services, and the exclusion of lower classes (Rosol, 2012)—much like food banks have done, and even more covertly.

In spite of such tensions, it is worth noting that reducing food insecurity through food production can be highly effective in other contexts. Food insecurity in many Indigenous communities, unlike in the general Canadian population, is tightly entwined with the food system. Self-sufficiency in food acquisition is especially important for northern Indigenous communities amid a lack of food affordability due to distance from markets; the uncertain effectiveness of the federal food subsidy program, *Nutrition North Canada*; diminishing access to traditional foods; and not least the imperative for decolonization (Dachner & Tarasuk, 2018). Even in these environments, however, financial resources are essential for accessing food through market channels *and* traditional foodways, which returns to the central problem of inadequate income (Pirkle et al., 2014). In the global South, smallholder food production is a firmly established poverty reduction strategy, one that is heavily featured in development discourses (Patel, 2009). According to Lipton (2005), virtually every instance of mass poverty reduction in modern history, documented in Western industrialized countries and fast-growing Asian countries, began with increases to employment income through increased productivity on family farms. Nevertheless, this idea has limited applicability to urban areas in industrialized countries due to a limited land base, lack of natural resources, declining agrarian labour force, and industries that have shifted away from agriculture (Bernstein, 2014). In cities, community-level initiatives mainly offer *food-provisioning*-based responses to the *income*-driven problem of HFI, and therein lies their inadequacy as solutions (Collins et al., 2014). If communities lack control over the social safety net at large, we ought to consider how they can support those who fall through their cracks while illuminating, rather than obscuring, these chasms. In this special issue, Lloro & Gonzalez (this issue) and Habib (this issue) offer compelling ways of doing so through relational networks that not only provide material support to people in need, but more importantly, render visible the injustices they face.

Food environments

Recurring among food-provisioning-based discourses is the concept of *food environments*, which concerns the relationship between built and social environments and dietary outcomes within a community or region (Glanz et al., 2005). It operates from the idea that food choices and nutritional status are influenced by one's physical, economic, policy, and sociocultural surroundings. The term encompasses a broad range of factors including geographic proximity; food access and availability; food promotion and pricing; food labelling; nutritional composition of foods; and the retail environment (Lana & Guest, 2017). Among the discourses discussed

previously, the food environments approach frequently overlaps with the nutritionist framework, due to its emphasis on consumer behaviour, as well as the local food movement, because of its community scale. In food environments literature, the term “food deserts” is frequently used to describe regions with low access to affordable and nutritious food, typically occurring in low-income areas (Lewis, 2015).

This phenomenon—most studied first in the U.K. and then the U.S.—is less applicable to Canadian cities, where retail food outlets do not tend to cluster in wealthier neighbourhoods (Black, 2015). Instead, Canadian literature suggests that central urban areas, containing inner city neighbourhoods, may have even better food access than those that are more affluent or suburban (Apparicio et al., 2007; Black et al., 2011). While this minimizes the marginalizing effect of uneven development on HFI overall, low-income populations residing in more affluent neighbourhoods or suburbs may still face additional barriers to acquiring food in the form of longer distances to food outlets, inadequate public transit, and lack of access to a private vehicle (Black, 2015). Although geography may exert some influence on food insecurity outcomes, poverty remains the overriding determinant of HFI in most cases.

While research into Canadian food environments is still in its early stages of development, Kirkpatrick and Tarasuk (2010) found that neighbourhood characteristics did not affect household food security among low-income families residing in Toronto. For these families, high rates of food insecurity still occurred in regions with good geographic food access, and it was not mitigated by proximity to food retail or food programs. By contrast, food insecurity was directly associated with household demographic factors including income and income source. Although neighbourhoods with low perceived social capital were associated with the risk of food insecurity, this effect became negligible once household demographic factors, including income, housing, education, household type, and immigration status, were accounted for. These findings reinforce the link between HFI and household, rather than neighbourhood characteristics.

Food environments discourse, particularly with reference to food deserts, is often presented in the form of maps that elucidate spatial disparities in socioeconomic conditions, but ultimately pathologize place instead of systemic inequalities relating to urban development and the distribution of wealth. Shannon (2014) suggests that the omission of political economic factors in maps often has real-world implications for regulating hunger under the façade of political neutrality. As a spatial, rather than political, problem, food deserts become something that can be solved using superficial solutions, such as building a supermarket, without redress to conditions that produce scarcity within neighbourhoods (Shannon, 2014), and much more importantly, households.

In food charity and local food discourses, the neoliberal solution at work may not necessarily be the blatant symbol of a supermarket, but a more savoury one of food banks and “community food assets” including community gardens, community food markets, and community kitchens. Simply placing food resources, even ones that are low- or no-cost, within vulnerable neighbourhoods does not redress the problem of fundamentally deficient incomes.

Moreover, these resources often fail to reach those who need them the most for reasons unrelated to proximity, namely their lack of basic necessities such as income, time, housing, and childcare (Kirkpatrick & Tarasuk, 2009; Loopstra, 2018).

The Deserving and undeserving poor

The distinction between the “deserving” and “undeserving” poor, referring to the idea that some economically marginalized groups deserve assistance more than others, pervades both income- and food-provisioning-based discourses. These categories originate from early-modern conceptions of idleness as a sin, with New England colonists providing aid only to those whose destitution resulted from unpreventable circumstances (Fisher, 2017), as well as the Victorian concept of less eligibility, which mandated that welfare should never exceed lowest wage labour in order to discipline the labour force and exert downward pressure on wages (Riches, 2018). Such attitudes converged in Canada, which owes its ideological heritage to both sides of the Atlantic, and have in recent decades found new life in punitive welfare policies across wealthy Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries (Riches, 2018). They also prevail in popular media, which differentiates between people in poverty through no fault of their own, and those who are supposedly to blame for their circumstances. Such assignment of blame belongs to the neoliberal rhetoric of individualizing societal liabilities, as previously illustrated in the nutritionist framework, and limiting social obligations to those who have succumbed to these liabilities. The “deserving” poor typically comprise children, families, people with disabilities, older adults, and veterans, whereas their so-called “undeserving” counterparts consist of people who use drugs, single mothers, and others with perceived personal flaws or poor lifestyle choices (Fisher, 2017).

Although anti-hunger advocates generally resist these categories, they inevitably invoke them to appeal to popular opinion and political pragmatism. Media produced by food banks, for instance, often feature images of children and families, while anti-poverty discourses sometimes fixate on child poverty (Fisher, 2017). Not only does this do a disservice to people unfairly portrayed as the “undeserving poor,” hiding substantial portions of the population, it also casts a victimizing, emotionally manipulative gaze on the “deserving poor” (Fisher, 2017). Whether through shame or pity, both groups are essentially rendered voiceless.

Assortative assistance to select groups may advance HFI reduction in some respects while perpetuating inaction in others. Provincial and federal policies reflect biases towards “deserving” subsets of the population, as evidenced by elevated income assistance for families and older individuals. Although rates of food insecurity are higher among households with children under the age of 18, the majority of food insecure households (43 percent) consists of single adults without children (Tarasuk, 2017; Tarasuk et al., 2016). Poverty reduction initiatives that target households with children, which are typically cornerstones of provincial poverty reduction strategies, therefore miss a large proportion of the food insecure population. BC’s first

poverty reduction strategy, for instance, aims to reduce child poverty by 50 percent by 2024, compared with its reduction target of 25 percent for the general population (Government of Canada, 2018). Although the poverty reduction strategy represents an important step towards HFI reduction, the child poverty target could have applied to the population at large. For Canadian seniors, Old Age Security and Guaranteed Income Supplement payments have been very effective at protection against HFI; due to its success, SDH proponents argue that this basic income model should extend to everyone below a defined income bracket, regardless of age (Tarasuk, 2017). Canada's National Poverty Strategy promises new supports for families, low-income seniors, individuals suffering from mental illness, low-income workers, and individuals seeking employment (Government of Canada, 2018). This is an encouraging development given that all these groups are vulnerable to poverty and food insecurity. Noticeably absent, however, are unemployed individuals who are unable to work, carrying on a tradition of punishing under-participation in the labour market. While discourses and policies relating to food insecurity should recognize needs and vulnerabilities specific to demographic groups, they should not discriminate on the basis of whether target populations “deserve” assistance or not. Everyone, after all, deserves to eat; it is a basic human need, and as some argue, a human right.

The right to food

If conservative media portrays the “undeserving” poor as entitled, they are ironically correct in the sense that everyone should be entitled to adequate and nutritious food, not least in affluent countries such as Canada. The right to food was originally developed on the international stage, beginning with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) in 1948, which states that “everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and wellbeing of himself and of his family, including food” (United Nations Human Rights, 2010, p. 7). This right was then reinforced at the 1996 World Food Summit, in which heads of state and governments recognized “the right of everyone to have access to safe and nutritious food, consistent with the right to adequate food and the fundamental right of everyone to be free from hunger” (FAO, 1996, para. 1). Thereafter, it was further defined by the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) in 1999 as “the right [of] every man, woman, and child, alone or in community with others, [to] have physical and economic access at all times to adequate food or means for its procurement” (United Nations Human Rights, 2010, p. 2). Although human rights discourse is generally directed towards the global South, former UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food, Olivier De Schutter, highlighted its renewed relevance to the global North during his visit to Canada in 2012 (De Schutter, 2012), drawing scrutiny to wealthy nations that have ignored the basic entitlements of their citizens, who are left unacceptably reliant on charitable food banking (Riches, 2018).

A common misconception about the right to food is that it is synonymous with the right to be fed, which entails the provisioning of food—something that food charity can accomplish to

some extent. Rather, it describes state obligations to allow people to feed themselves with dignity, whether through producing or purchasing food:

Individuals are expected to meet their own needs, through their own efforts and using their own resources. To be able to do this, a person must live in conditions that allow him or her either to produce food or to buy it. To produce his or her own food, a person needs land, seeds, water, and other resources, and to buy it, one needs money and access to the market. The right to food requires States to provide an enabling environment in which people can use their full potential to produce or procure adequate food for themselves and their families. (United Nations Human Rights, 2010, pp. 3-4)

As we can see from the quotation above, it is more feasible for governments in wealthy nations to provide “money and access to the market” than it is for them to provide “land, seeds, water, and other resources,” especially in urban environments. At the same time, the latter approach is central to supporting both foodways and livelihoods in many Indigenous, rural, and global South communities. Both pathways to procuring food are equally significant if we are to ensure access to food that is adequate, sustainable, and equitable; only then can societies be truly food secure. In this regard, the right to food reconciles different, sometimes competing, means toward the shared objective of food justice.

The right to food also carries, and potentially connects, varying conceptualizations of justice and its operational agents. Riches (2018) and Poppendieck (this issue) argue that the right to food is not a voluntary matter of charity, but a legal obligation enacted through public policies—drawing crucial attention to their contemporary neglect. Further, Riches (2018) sees the right to food as a legal contract for which the State is a “primary duty bearer” to be held accountable by international entities such as the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESR), the Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights (OPESCR), the FAO Right to Food team, the UN Human Rights Council, and the UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food. This is where our analysis diverges slightly from Riches’s approach, which may rely too heavily on legal mechanisms that inadequately serve social justice in practice. By framing rights as claims that are “actionable through courts,” Riches (2018) assumes the impartiality of legal systems that may function to preserve, rather than resist, systems of oppression such as neoliberalism. But if Riches criticizes the de-politicization of hunger, political solutions are unlikely to lie within institutions that maintain a façade of objectivity, yet under which market logics continue to undermine public entitlements. International coalitions, even those functioning to uphold human rights, contain sets of countries engaged in neoliberal trade networks (e.g., OECD countries) that have contributed to labour exploitation worldwide. While we generally agree that the State should be the main guarantor of rights, and international bodies an important source of public accountability, we envision grassroots movements to be more significant sources of political pressure. These

movements may operate very effectively through community food programs, even though many of these programs have neglected the politics of poverty thus far—likely due to the voluntary sector’s inevitable reliance on precarious funding and public support. Gardens and goodwill are politically palatable; anti-poverty advocacy is not.

By comparison to Riches’s (2018) emphasis on national and international law, Fisher (2017) assigns more significance to the role of civic mobilization. From his perspective, the right to food inadequately accounts for citizen pressure occurring outside of the government sphere, but nevertheless represents an important educational and organizing tool. He advocates for increasing public participation particularly among economically marginalized communities, who are often “missing from the table” regarding conversations about hunger and poverty. That way, Fisher (2017) argues, “they begin to see themselves as actors in their own lives rather than being acted upon” (p. 3). Perhaps the missing ingredient in HFI reduction, as in food systems reform, is agency—a value that underlies the right to food. And yet, food insecure people cannot fully enjoy freedom from political exclusion until they receive that from want, which returns to the centrality of welfare supports (e.g., income assistance, childcare, housing) that enable, more broadly, the right to a dignified life.

Civic participation in the right to food

Given the limits to jurisprudence, and the underutilized potential of civil society, we propose more participatory approaches to the right to food. Politically empowering civil society, without offloading welfare responsibilities onto it, is necessary for counterbalancing the primary authority, that human rights discourse has traditionally placed on senior governments. Conceived as public entitlements, social and economic rights require social institutions, namely nation-states, as guarantors—the very establishments that have been instruments of systemic oppression and/or exclusion throughout history. Just as World War II ushered in a new recognition for universal human rights, so did it generate stateless individuals whose rights were unrecognized and violated in the absence of social citizenship (DeGooyer, 2020). Their unprotected claims to human rights are what Arendt (1951) terms the “right to have rights,” a concept that retains contemporary relevance not limited to statelessness (e.g. refugees, migrants), but also to social groups that have been otherwise excluded from social protections and civic participation (e.g. sex workers, homeless individuals), or most saliently, to people (e.g. Indigenous populations) whose claims to their land, livelihoods, and culture have been systematically violated by the state. In recognizing the “right to have rights,” DeGooyer (2020) conceives of human rights not necessarily as ends in themselves, nor as resources that one possesses, but as an ongoing negotiation for social inclusion in political communities and ultimately, the policymaking realm. In this paper, we invoke this conceptualization to connect civic mobilization with state accountability for HFI reduction.

DeGooyer's (2020) interpretation of rights also responds to the risk of homogenizing diverse social circumstances in internationalist human rights discourse, which tends to essentialize the human condition. While rights are certainly universal, and hold widespread appeal in that regard, they must also attend to social differences, inequalities, and vulnerabilities including ones produced by systems of oppression that pervade institutions tasked with guaranteeing human rights. Neoliberalism, the focus of the present paper, represents only one branch of deep-rooted injustice: it intersects with other oppressive forces such as colonialism, racism, and patriarchy, to produce social disparities in income and food access. To illustrate, disproportionately high rates of food insecurity occur in Canadians households led by Black (28.9 percent), Indigenous (28.2 percent), or lone mother (33.1 percent) individuals, compared with the national average of 12.7 percent (Tarasuk & Mitchell, 2020). This is one example in which social of determinants of health research illuminates structural injustices that drive inequitable HFI outcomes.

For those who have been alienated from society, then, grassroots movements potentially offer important spaces for affirming their inalienable yet unfulfilled rights. As congregational sites for food insecure individuals and people who care about them, community food programs are well-positioned to amplify diverse voices in collective action towards the right to food. Hence, the role of civil society is not necessarily to assume the state's obligation to reduce HFI, but to hold it accountable to that obligation. But even within civil society, communities may yet be exclusive, defined by who belongs and who does not. Members of civil society, then, are responsible for reckoning with our terms of social inclusion and the power that those terms afford, whether in low-barrier settings for all or safe spaces for specific vulnerable groups.

Ideally, communities should continue to produce or provide food for those in need; however, they must also leverage their position to draw awareness to, rather than conceal, the neoliberal state's perpetuation of this need in society. Habib (this issue) and Lloro & Gonzalez (this issue) have demonstrated powerful ways in which volunteering undertaken on a relational, rather than paternalistic, basis may mobilize critical solidarity towards systemic change. These examples show that policies may be institutional, but their social consequences are personally experienced, and understood by others through interpersonal interactions. In this sense, the right to food engenders not only state obligations, which are meaningless if unfulfilled, but our social responsibilities and relations to one another. As with representations of HFI, human rights are socially engineered and enforced; they are neither inherent nor inevitable, but insisted upon collectively. According to Poppendieck (this issue), "they do not exist in the abstract but are created by human beings and human institutions." We cannot lose sight of the humanity behind food justice, nor the inhumanity of food insecurity.

Conclusion

From competition to collaboration

This article has aimed to delineate and critique several competing HFI frameworks and, pointing out the lack of discursive consensus, to clarify their suitability for reducing HFI. The link between income and food insecurity is well-established, with proven social policy solutions, in HFI research. Yet the majority of discourses, especially those that have captured public attention, inaccurately or unsuitably redefine the problem within the contexts of consumer behaviour, food systems, or food redistribution, and misdirect responses accordingly. To shift these narratives, we have highlighted food insecurity's context of poverty, as examined in social determinants of health discourse, and even more structurally, its underlying politics of neoliberalism, conceptualized using a political economy approach (Mendly-Zambo & Raphael, 2019). These factors are frequently overlooked because hunger reduction initiatives enjoy popular support only if they appear politically benign—as community gardens, cooking workshops, soup kitchens, and food banks generally do.

Tellingly, food charity organizations tend to employ the term “hunger” instead of HFI. This has the effect of evoking an embodied feeling that is universally understood, while disembodiment that feeling from the socioeconomic circumstances of the household (National Research Council, 2006; Riches, 2018). Although the viscerality of hunger may inspire action in civil society, such action is often directed towards charitable initiatives that perpetuate, rather than reduce, HFI. Following in the American tradition of framing social change in militaristic terms, reflecting the origins of food bank institutions, charitable initiatives use the phrase “fighting hunger” in public communication to evoke notions of an unending battle against an ambiguous enemy (Fisher, 2017)—or even against the victims themselves. Hunger thus becomes something that everyone, regardless of politics, can rally behind in isolation from its social, economic, and political drivers. This phenomenon, the counterproductive public support for food charity, is what Riches (2018) calls “uncritical solidarity.” This is not to implicate well-intentioned members of the public, but rather to indict the powerful institutions and interest groups maintaining the conditions that produce HFI. Hence the need for critical dialogue, as invited by this special issue, between labour, welfare, and food movements that may collaborate, rather than compete, to counter systemic food-related inequities (Rosol et al., this issue).

Fighting against hunger, or for rights?

The militaristic rhetoric of “fighting hunger” is especially fitting considering the “hunger-industrial complex” that food bank operations have spawned. Take, for instance, General Mills's \$5 million “manufacture to donate” food bank initiative in the midst of the pandemic (Amick, 2020). The initiative was rolled out just as their profits increased by 19 percent to \$688 million

(Painter, 2020)—capital accrued at the expense of its essential workers’ safety and livelihoods. Much like the military-industrial complex, a mutually beneficial alliance has formed between anti-hunger groups and corporations (Fisher, 2017), with food bank warehouses serving as barracks armed with perishable donations. Due to the profitability of this arrangement, neither party is truly interested in ending what they are purporting to fight, implicitly perpetuating, and expanding worldwide. Such is warfare—whether against hunger, terror, drugs, or the like. Just food futures, we envision, are ones that are compassionate rather than combative.

Befitting its martial milieu, COVID-19 now augurs diverging wartime outcomes with no easy victories for HFI reduction, much less “win-wins” for reducing food waste and hunger. One branch leads to further corporate entrenchment and welfare retrenchment in the continued “fight against hunger,” as evidenced by the Canadian government’s \$200 million in contributions to food banks (Rabson, 2020). Even more notoriously, the federal government granted a now defunct contract with WE charity for a student grant program, awarded through personal connections to the Prime Minister (CBC News, 2020b). These actions evince the state’s neoliberal tendency to offload public programs and entitlements to private interest groups. Another, more optimistic, trajectory potentially points towards renewed attention to human rights, reminiscent of the post-World War II era, when public programs grew out of recognition for the basic entitlements of citizens; when food banks were non-existent in Canada. In this vein, the Canada Emergency Response Benefit and Canada Recovery Benefit programs, which have essentially provided a basic income to all who have lost employment during COVID-19, represent an important, albeit incomplete, step towards restoring the post-war welfare state. But before romanticizing the past, we must acknowledge the exclusionary nature of human rights in practice, even when social policies were much more robust. Hence the need for a more participatory approach to human rights for which the “right to have rights” is a precondition. If this foremost right cannot be met by nation-states, which only selectively recognize the rights of their residents (and non-residents), it might be realized by political communities that confer social citizenship to those whose rights have been denied, and who experience HFI as a consequence.

As we have demonstrated, HFI reduction will require a concerted effort from all sectors of society, which hold unequal levels of culpability for, and authority over, HFI. In turn, HFI reduction is but one component of food justice, a project that extends far beyond consumer access to address inequitable and unsustainable supply chains as a whole. Implicit in this wider goal is the understanding that adequate and nutritious food is a human right. The right to food thus offers a unifying framework for cultivating underdeveloped synergies, such as between civil society, governments, and international institutions, or between labour, welfare, and food systems. Meanwhile, it also informs critical analysis of false linkages, such as that between food waste and hunger, or corporate interests and public policies. In critical solidarity, unlike in the “fight against hunger,” there are no military heroes (certainly not General Mills), but rather allies to humans who carry inalienable rights, including the right to food.

References

- Allen, P. (1999). Reweaving the food security safety net: Mediating entitlement and entrepreneurship. *Agriculture and Human Values*, 16(2), 117-129.
<https://doi.org/10.1023/A:1007593210496>
- Amick, B. (2020, April 27). General Mills launches ‘manufacture to donate’ program. *Food Business News*. <https://www.foodbusinessnews.net/articles/15901-general-mills-launches-manufacture-to-donate-program#:~:text=MINNEAPOLIS%20%E2%80%94%20General%20Mills%2C%20Inc.,it%20straight%20to%20Feeding%20America.>
- Apparicio, P., Cloutier, M. S., & Shearmur, R. (2007). The case of Montreal’s missing food deserts: Evaluation of accessibility to food supermarkets. *International Journal of Health Geographics*, 6(1), 4. <https://doi.org/10.1186/1476-072X-6-4>
- Arendt, H. (1951). *The origins of totalitarianism*. Harcourt, Inc.
- Ayo, N. (2012). Understanding health promotion in a neoliberal climate and the making of health conscious citizens. *Critical public health*, 22(1), 99-105.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/09581596.2010.520692>
- Bernstein, H. (2014). Food sovereignty via the ‘peasant way’: a sceptical view. *Journal of Peasant Studies*, 41(6), 1031-1063. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03066150.2013.852082>
- Bernstein, H. (2016). Agrarian political economy and modern world capitalism: the contributions of food regime analysis. *The Journal of Peasant Studies*, 43(3), 611-647.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/03066150.2015.1101456>
- Black, J. L., Carpiano, R. M., Fleming, S., & Lauster, N. (2011). Exploring the distribution of food stores in British Columbia: associations with neighbourhood socio-demographic factors and urban form. *Health & Place*, 17(4), 961-970.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.healthplace.2011.04.002>
- Black, J. (2015). Local food environments outside of the United States - A look to the north: Examining food environments in Canada. In K. Morland (Ed.), *In Local food environments: Food access in America* (pp. 231-269). CRC Press.
- Campbell, E. C., Ross, M., & Webb, K. L. (2013). Improving the nutritional quality of emergency food: A study of food bank organizational culture, capacity, and practices. *Journal of Hunger & Environmental Nutrition*, 8(3), 261-280.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/19320248.2013.816991>
- CBC News. (2020a, June 12). *Grocery chains scrap \$2 hourly pay bump for workers implemented at start of COVID-19*. CBC News.
<https://www.cbc.ca/news/business/grocery-chains-covid-pay-1.5609290>
- CBC News. (2020b, September 9). *The WE Charity controversy explained*. CBC News.
<https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/we-charity-student-grant-justin-trudeau-testimony-1.5666676>

- Cheshire, L., & Lawrence, G. (2005). Neoliberalism, individualisation, and community: Regional restructuring in Australia. *Social Identities, 11*(5), 435-445.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/13504630500407869>
- Collins, P. A., Power, E. M., & Little, M. H. (2014). Municipal-level responses to household food insecurity in Canada: a call for critical, evaluative research. *Canadian Journal of Public Health, 105*(2), e138-e141. <https://doi.org/10.17269/cjph.105.4224>
- Dachner, N., Ricciuto, L., Kirkpatrick, S. I., & Tarasuk, V. (2010). Food purchasing and food insecurity: among low-income families in Toronto. *Canadian Journal of Dietetic Practice and Research, 71*(3), e50-e56. <https://doi.org/10.3148/71.3.2010.127>
- Dachner, N., & Tarasuk, V. (2018). Tackling household food insecurity: An essential goal of a national food policy. *Canadian Food Studies/La Revue canadienne des études sur l'alimentation, 5*(3), 230-247.
- Daponte, B. O., Lewis, G. H., Sanders, S., & Taylor, L. (1998). Food pantry use among low-income households in Allegheny County, Pennsylvania. *Journal of Nutrition Education, 30*(1), 50-57. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0022-3182\(98\)70275-4](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0022-3182(98)70275-4)
- DeGooyer, S., Hunt, A., Maxwell, L., & Moyn, S. (2018). *The right to have rights*. Verso Books.
- De Schutter, O. (2012). *Report of the special rapporteur on the right to food*. United Nations Human Rights Council.
https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/742873/files/A_HRC_22_50_Add-1-EN.pdf
- Desjardins, E. (2013). “*Making Something Out of Nothing*”: Food literacy among youth, young pregnant women and young parents who are at risk for poor health. Public Health Ontario: Locally Driven Collaborative Projects (LDCP). <https://foodsecurecanada.org/resources-news/resources-research/making-something-out-nothing-food-literacy-among-youth-young-0>
- Dixon, J., Omwega, A. M., Friel, S., Burns, C., Donati, K., & Carlisle, R. (2007). The health equity dimensions of urban food systems. *Journal of Urban Health, 84*(1), 118-129.
<https://doi.org/10.1007%2Fs11524-007-9176-4>
- Douglas, F., Sapko, J., Kiezebrink, K., & Kyle, J. (2015). Resourcefulness, desperation, shame, gratitude and powerlessness: common themes emerging from a study of food bank use in northeast Scotland. *AIMS Public Health, 2*(3), 297.
<https://doi.org/10.3934/publichealth.2015.3.297>
- Emery, J., Fleisch, V., & McIntyre, L. (2013) ‘Legislated changes to federal pension income in Canada will adversely affect low income seniors’ health’. *Preventive Medicine, 57*(6), 963–6. doi:10.1016/j.ypped.2013.09.004.
- Engler-Stringer, R. (2011). Food selection and preparation practices in a group of young low-income women in Montreal. *Appetite, 56*(1), 118-121.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.appet.2010.12.004>
- Fisher, A. (2017). *Big hunger: The unholy alliance between corporate America and anti-hunger groups*. The MIT Press.

- Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO). (1996). *Rome declaration on world food security and world food summit plan of action*. Rome, Italy: FAO.
www.fao.org/docrep/003/w3613e/w3613e00.htm
- Food Banks Canada (2021). *Hunger Count: 2021 Report*.
<https://www.hungercount.foodbanksCanada.ca>
- Foucault, M. (1972). *The archeology of knowledge*. Pantheon Books.
- Friedmann, H. (2012). Changing food systems from top to bottom: Political economy and social movements perspectives. In M. Koc, J. Sumner, & A. Winson (Eds.), *Critical Perspectives in Food Studie* (pp.16-32). Oxford University Press.
- Friel, S., & Lichacz, W. (2010). Unequal food systems, unhealthy diets. In G. Lawrence, K. Lyons, & T. Wallington (Eds.), *Food Security, Nutrition and Sustainability* (pp. 115-129). Routledge.
- Glanz, K., Sallis, J. F., Saelens, B. E., & Frank, L. D. (2005). Healthy nutrition environments: concepts and measures. *American journal of health promotion*, 19(5), 330-333.
<https://doi.org/10.4278/0890-1171-19.5.330>
- Gómez, M. I., Barrett, C. B., Raney, T., Pinstrip-Andersen, P., Meerman, J., Croppenstedt, A., Carisam, B. & Thompson, B. (2013). Post-green revolution food systems and the triple burden of malnutrition. *Food Policy*, 42, 129-138.
- Gottlieb, R., & Fisher, A. (1996). Community food security and environmental justice: Searching for a common discourse. *Agriculture and Human Values*, 13(3), 23-32.
- Government of Canada. (2018). *Opportunity for all – Canada’s first poverty reduction strategy*. (Catalogue No. Em12-48/2018E-PDF). Employment and social development Canada.
<https://www.canada.ca/en/employment-social-development/programs/poverty-reduction/reports/strategy.html>
- Habib, S. (2022). Opportunity in crisis: shifting public will to transform food systems. *Canadian Food Studies / La Revue Canadienne des études sur l'alimentation* 9(2), 64-74.
<https://doi.org/10.15353/cfs-rcea.v9i2.538>
- Hamelin, A. M., Mercier, C., & Bédard, A. (2011). Needs for food security from the standpoint of Canadian households participating and not participating in community food programmes. *International Journal of Consumer Studies*, 35(1), 58-68.
- Hazell, P. B. R. (2010) The Asian green revolution. In D. J. Spielman, & R. Pandya-Lorch (Eds.), *Proven successes in agricultural development* (pp. 67–97). International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI).
- Heisz, A. (2019). *An update on the market basket measure comprehensive review*. (Report No. 75F0002M). <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/75f0002m/75f0002m2019009-eng.htm>
- Heynen, N., Kurtz, H. E., & Trauger, A. (2012). Food justice, hunger and the city. *Geography Compass*, 6(5), 304-311.
- Holmes, E., Black, J. L., Heckelman, A., Lear, S. A., Seto, D., Fowokan, A., & Wittman, H. (2018). “Nothing is going to change three months from now”: A mixed methods

- characterization of food bank use in Greater Vancouver. *Social Science & Medicine*, 200, 129-136.
- Huisken, A., Orr, S. K., & Tarasuk, V. (2016). Adults' food skills and use of gardens are not associated with household food insecurity in Canada. *Canadian Journal of Public Health*, 107(6), e526-e532.
- Kicinski, L. R. (2012). Characteristics of short and long-term food pantry users. *Michigan Sociological Review*, 26, 58-74.
- Kirkpatrick, S. I., & Tarasuk, V. (2009). Food insecurity and participation in community food programs among low-income Toronto families. *Canadian Journal of Public Health*, 100(2), 135-139.
- Kirkpatrick, S. I., & Tarasuk, V. (2010). Assessing the relevance of neighbourhood characteristics to the household food security of low-income Toronto families. *Public Health Nutrition*, 13(7), 1139-1148.
- Kuhn, T. S. (1970). *The structure of scientific revolutions*. University of Chicago Press.
- Labonte, R. (1993). *Health promotion and empowerment: Practice frameworks*. Centre for Health Promotion and ParicipAction.
- Lewis, L. (2015). Food deserts. In K. Albala (Ed.), *The SAGE encyclopedia of food issues* (Vol. 1, pp. 561-564). SAGE Publications, Inc., <https://dx.doi.org/10.4135/9781483346304.n174>
- Lipton, M. (2005). *The family farm in a globalizing world: The role of crop science in alleviating poverty*. 2020 Vision Discussion Papers 40. International Food Policy Research Institute. <https://www.ifpri.org/publication/family-farm-globalizing-world>
- Lloro, T., & Gonzalez, F. (this issue). Food activism, education, and negotiating the gendered dynamics of public cultures of care. Manuscript submitted for publication.
- Loopstra, R., & Tarasuk, V. (2013). Perspectives on community gardens, community kitchens and the Good Food Box program in a community-based sample of low-income families. *Canadian Journal of Public Health*, 104(1), e55-59.
- Loopstra, R., & Tarasuk, V. (2015). 'Food bank usage is a poor indicator of food insecurity: Insights from Canada'. *Social Policy and Society*, 14(3), 443–55.
- Loopstra, R. (2018). Interventions to address household food insecurity in high-income countries. *Proceedings of the Nutrition Society*, 77(3), 270-281.
Doi:10.1017/S002966511800006X
- Lougheed, S., & Spring, C. (2020). Conduits that bite back: challenging the 'win-win' solutions of food recalls and redistribution. In C. Reynolds, T. Soma, C. Spring, & J. Lazell (Eds.), *Routledge handbook of food waste* (pp. 457–470). Routledge.
- Marx, K. (1859). *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*. Progress Publishers.
- McClintock, N. (2014). Radical, reformist, and garden-variety neoliberal: coming to terms with urban agriculture's contradictions. *Local Environment*, 19(2), 147-171.

- McIntyre, L. (2003). Food security: more than a determinant of health. *Policy Options*, 24(3), 46-51.
- McIntyre, L., & Rondeau, K. (2009) Food insecurity in Canada. In D. Raphael (Ed.), *Social determinants of health: Canadian perspectives* (2nd ed.; pp. 188-204). Canadian Scholars Press.
- McIntyre, L., & Anderson, L. (2016). Food insecurity. In D. Raphael (Ed.), *Social determinants of health: Canadian perspectives* (3rd ed.; pp. 294-32). Canadian Scholars' Press.
- McIntyre, L., Patterson, P., Anderson, L., & Mah, C. (2016a) Household food insecurity in Canada: problem definition and potential solutions in the public policy domain. *Canadian Public Policy*, 42(1), 83–93.
- McIntyre, L., Wu, X., Fleisch, V. C., & Emery, J. H. (2016b). Homeowner versus non-homeowner differences in household food insecurity in Canada. *Journal of Housing and the Built Environment*, 31(2), 349-366.
- Mclaughlin, C., Tarasuk, V., & Kreiger, N. (2003). An examination of at-home food preparation activity among low-income, food-insecure women. *Journal of the American Dietetic Association*, 103(11), 1506-1512.
- McMichael, P. (2009). A food regime genealogy. *The Journal of Peasant Studies*, 36(1), 139-169.
- Mendly-Zambo, Z., & Raphael, D. (2019). Competing discourses of household food insecurity in Canada. *Social Policy and Society*, 18(4), 535-554.
- Midgley, J. L. (2012). Problematizing the emergence of household food security in England. *International Journal of the Society of Agriculture and Food*, 20(3), 293–311.
- Mikkonen, J., & Raphael, D. (2010). *Social Determinants of Health: The Canadian Facts*. York University School of Health Policy and Management. https://thecanadianfacts.org/The_Canadian_Facts.pdf
- Mosco, V. (2009). *The political economy of communication*. SAGE Publications Ltd. <https://www.doi.org/10.4135/9781446279946>
- Mosco, V. (2014). Political economic theory and research. In R. S. Fortner, & P. M. Fackler (Eds.), *The handbook of media and mass communication theory*. John Wiley & Sons.
- National Research Council. (2006). *Food insecurity and hunger in the United States: An assessment of the measure*. National Academies Press.
- Painter, K. L. (2020, December 17). *General Mills continues riding the stay-at-home wave, prepares for post-pandemic life*. Star Tribune. <https://www.startribune.com/general-mills-continues-riding-the-stay-at-home-wave-prepares-for-post-pandemic-life/573415031/?refresh=true>
- Patel, R. (2009). Food sovereignty. *The Journal of Peasant Studies*, 36(3), 663-706.
- Peck, J., & Tickell, A. (2002). Neoliberalizing space. *Antipode*, 34(3), 380-404.

- Peck, J., & Tickell, A. (2007). Conceptualizing neoliberalism, thinking Thatcherism. *Contesting neoliberalism: Urban frontiers*, 26, 50.
- Pirkle, C. M., Lucas, M., Dallaire, R., Ayotte, P., Jacobson, J. L., Jacobson, S. W., Dewailly, E., & Muckle, G. (2014). Food insecurity and nutritional biomarkers in relation to stature in Inuit children from Nunavik. *Canadian Journal of Public Health*, 105(4), e233-e238.
- Poppendieck, J. (2022). Reformist, progressive, radical: The case for an inclusive alliance. *Canadian Food Studies / La Revue Canadienne des études sur l'alimentation* 9(2), 53-63. <https://doi.org/10.15353/cfs-rcea.v9i2.534>
- Power, E. M. (1999). Combining social justice and sustainability for food security. In M. Koc, R. MacRae, L. J. A. Mougeot, & J. Welsh (Eds.), *For hunger-proof cities: sustainable urban food systems* (pp. 30-7). International Development Research Centre.
- Power, E. M. (2005). Determinants of healthy eating among low-income Canadians. *Canadian journal of public health/revue canadienne de sante'e publique*, 96(3), S37-S42.
- Power, E., & McBay, M. (2022). An unconditional basic income is necessary but insufficient to transform towards just food futures. *Canadian Food Studies / La Revue Canadienne Des Études Sur l'alimentation* 9(2), 31-37. <https://doi.org/10.15353/cfs-rcea.v9i2.533>
- Procyk, S. (2014). *Understanding income inequality in Canada, 1980 – 2014*. <http://neighbourhoodchange.ca/documents/2015/02/understanding-income-inequality-in-canada-1980-2014.pdf>
- Provincial Health Services Authority (2016). *Priority health equity indicators for British Columbia: Household food insecurity indicator report*. <https://proof.utoronto.ca/wp-content/uploads/2016/08/1186-PHS-Priority-health-equity-indicators-WEB.pdf>
- Pudup, M. B. (2008). It takes a garden: Cultivating citizen-subjects in organized garden projects. *Geoforum*, 39(3), 1228-1240.
- Rabson, M. (2020, October 9). *Feds double pandemic aid for food banks, add a second \$100 million in support*. CTV News. <https://www.ctvnews.ca/politics/feds-double-pandemic-aid-for-food-banks-add-a-second-100-million-in-support-1.5139174>
- Raine, K., McIntyre, L., & Dayle, J. B. (2003). The failure of charitable school-and community-based nutrition programmes to feed hungry children. *Critical Public Health*, 13(2), 155-169.
- Raine, K. (2005). Determinants of healthy eating in Canada: an overview and synthesis. *Canadian Journal of Public Health/Revue Canadienne De Sante'e Publique*, 96(3), S8–S14.
- Raphael, D. (2016). Social Determinants of Health: Key Issues and Themes. In D. Raphael (Ed.), *Social determinants of health: Canadian perspectives* (3rd ed.). Canadian Scholars' Press.
- Riches, G. (1997). Hunger in Canada: Abandoning the right to food. In G. Riches (Ed.), *First world hunger* (pp. 46-77). Palgrave Macmillan.
- Riches, G. (2011). Thinking and acting outside the charitable food aid box: hunger and the right to food in rich societies. *Development in Practice* 21, (4), 768-775.

- Riches, G., & Tarasuk, V. (2014). Canada: Thirty years of food charity and public policy neglect. In G. Riches, & T. Silvasti (Eds.), *First World Hunger Revisited* (pp. 42-56). Palgrave Macmillan.
- Riches, G. (2018). *Food bank nations: Poverty, corporate charity and the right to food*. Routledge.
- Rosol, M. (2010). Public participation in post-Fordist urban green space governance: The case of community gardens in Berlin. *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, 34(3), 548-563.
- Rosol, M. (2012). Community volunteering as neoliberal strategy? Green space production in Berlin. *Antipode*, 44(1), 239-257. doi:10.1111/j.1467-8330.2011.00861.x
- Rosol, M. (2018). Politics of urban gardening. In K. Ward, A. E. G. Jonas, B. Miller, & D. Wilson (Eds.), *The Routledge handbook on spaces of urban politics* (pp. 134–145). Routledge.
- Rosol, M., Holt-Giménez, E., Kepkiewicz, L., & Vibert, E. (2022). Towards just food futures: Divergent approaches and possibilities for collaboration across difference. *Canadian Food Studies / La Revue Canadienne Des Études Sur l'alimentation* 9(2), 1-30. <https://doi.org/10.15353/cfs-rcea.v9i2.598>
- Seed, B., Lang, T., Caraher, M., & Ostry, A. (2014). Exploring Public Health's roles and limitations in advancing food security in British Columbia. *Canadian Journal of Public Health*, 105(5), e324-329.
- Sen, A. (1985). *Commodities and capabilities*. North-Holland.
- Sen, A. (2001). *Development as freedom*. Oxford University Press.
- Shannon, J. (2014). Food deserts: Governing obesity in the neoliberal city. *Progress in Human Geography*, 38(2), 248-266.
- Stuckler, D., McKee, M., Ebrahim, S., & Basu, S. (2012). Manufacturing epidemics: the role of global producers in increased consumption of unhealthy commodities including processed foods, alcohol, and tobacco. *PLoS medicine*, 9(6), e1001235.
- Stuckler, D., & Nestle, M. (2012). Big food, food systems, and global health. *PLoS medicine*, 9(6), e1001242.
- Tarasuk, V., & Reynolds, R. (1999). A qualitative study of community kitchens as a response to income-related food insecurity. *Canadian Journal of Dietetic Practice and Research*, 60(1), 11.
- Tarasuk, V. (2001). A critical examination of community-based responses to household food insecurity in Canada. *Health Education & Behavior*, 28(4), 487-499.
- Tarasuk, V., & Eakin, J. M. (2005). Food assistance through “surplus” food: Insights from an ethnographic study of food bank work. *Agriculture and Human Values*, 22(2), 177-186.
- Tarasuk, V., Dachner, N., & Loopstra, R. (2014). Food banks, welfare, and food insecurity in Canada. *British Food Journal*, 116(9), 1405-1417.

- Tarasuk, V., Mitchell, A., & Dachner, N. (2016). *Household food insecurity in Canada, 2014*. Toronto, ON: Research to identify policy options to reduce food insecurity (PROOF). <https://proof.utoronto.ca/>
- Tarasuk, V. (2017). *Implications of a basic income guarantee for household food insecurity*. Northern Policy Institute.
- Tarasuk, V., & Mitchell, A. (2020). *Household food insecurity in Canada, 2017-18. Toronto: Research to identify policy options to reduce food insecurity (PROOF)*. <https://proof.utoronto.ca/>
- UN General Assembly. (1948). *Universal declaration of human rights* (217 [III] A). Paris. <https://www.un.org/en/universal-declaration-human-rights/index.html>
- United Nations Human Rights. (2010). *The right to adequate food*. Geneva. <https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Publications/FactSheet34en.pdf>
- Wilson, D. (2004). Toward a contingent urban neoliberalism. *Urban geography*, 25(8), 771-783.
- Wong, A., & Hallsworth, A. (2016). Local food security initiatives: systemic limitations in Vancouver, Canada. *Future of Food: Journal on Food, Agriculture and Society*, 4(1), 7-28.



Original Research Article

Unwrapping school lunch: Examining the social dynamics and caring relationships that play out during school lunchJennifer Black^{a*}, Rachel Mazac^b, Amber Heckelman^a, and Sinikka Elliott^a University of British Columbia^b University of Helsinki

Abstract

Students are important stakeholders in school food programs. Yet children's daily experiences and voices are often overlooked in advocacy around school food. In Canada, where the federal government recently expressed interest in creating a National School Food Program, nearly no research has documented the first-hand experiences of children during lunch. This ethnographic study draws on data collected during 36 lunchtimes in three Canadian schools during a transitional period in a school district's lunch program. The findings unwrap the powerful role of students' perceptions of and relationships to food in shaping their social interactions, and their sense of care, connection, and identity. Classroom observations coupled with photos of school lunches demonstrate the wide diversity of foods eaten at school and the nuanced, complex, and sometimes divergent meanings children give to food, school lunch and the people involved in preparing, serving, supervising, and sharing lunchtime experiences. Students demonstrated in-depth knowledge of the food choices and attitudes of their peers and actively marked out their identities vis-à-vis food. Students frequently talked about food as a site of care and support, and both the social relationships and care work that played out were a major part of school lunch experiences. Understanding the intricacies of children's school lunch experiences, including the relationships, meanings, and values that shape school lunch, will be critical for creating robust school food programs and policies in Canada that better serve the needs of children and reduce rather than reproduce existing health and social inequalities.

Keywords: School lunch; children; care work; ethnographic research

*Corresponding author: j.black@ubc.ca

DOI: 10.15353/cfs-rcea.v9i2.544

ISSN: 2292-3071

Introduction

School-based policies and programs that improve children's access to nutritious food, wellbeing, and educational outcomes have long been recommended by international health and education advocates (CDC, 1996; Jaime & Lock, 2009; McKenna, 2010; Veugelers & Schwartz, 2010; WHO, 2020). Successful school lunch programs in particular can contribute to improved dietary quality among children, with the potential to benefit students from across the socioeconomic spectrum (Everitt et al., 2020; Greenhalgh et al., 2007; Hernandez et al., 2018). In countries like the United States where a national school lunch program exists, school food programs contribute to reduced rates of food insecurity for households with children (Arteaga & Heflin, 2014; Gundersen, 2015; Ralston et al., 2017) and positively affect not only school attendance, but also academic achievement (Anderson et al., 2017; Cohen et al., 2021; Hinrichs, 2010).

Some studies, however, find that school food programs can reproduce inequality by reinforcing stigma for those participating in programs labeled or understood as being designed for poor students (Best, 2017; Gaddis, 2019; McIntyre et al., 1999; McIsaac et al., 2018; Poppendieck, 2010). Other programs fall short of their stated goal to feed hungry children when cost or fear of stigma discourages participation (Bhatia et al., 2011; Poppendieck, 2010; Raine et al., 2003). Programs may miss the mark if adult program designers assume that they know what will resonate for children and disregard the lived experiences of the end users. Consequently, meal programs may not work well for children who can exert their agency by opting out. We can learn much by allying with and listening to children and those responsible for caring for them in the school setting, so that these key stakeholders can meaningfully take part in research and inform the design of programs that affect them. As such, researchers can support the enactment of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child that asserts that children have the right to give their opinions and to be listened to in matters that concern them (Pais & Bissell, 2006).

School lunch in Canada

Unlike the United States and most other Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) countries, Canada does not have a nationally-funded school lunch program (Everitt et al., 2020). The Canadian government expressed interest in creating a National School Food Program in 2019 (Government of Canada, 2019), and the federal Liberal Party who were re-elected to lead a minority government in September 2021 further pledged to invest \$1 billion over five years towards a “national school nutritious meal program” in their campaign platform (Liberal Party of Canada, 2021), yet the majority of students currently bring a packed lunch from home. In 2004, fewer than one in ten students reported eating a lunch prepared by schools when asked about what was consumed on the previous school day. That year

was the last time the national Canadian Community Health Survey asked an explicit question about where foods were prepared on nationally representative twenty-four hour dietary recalls (Tugault-Lafleur et al., 2017). Given that relatively little scholarly attention has examined Canadian children’s experiences with school lunch, Canada additionally serves as an important case to examine the benefits and challenges of school food programs due to the absence of nationally coordinated efforts. Further research is needed to inform the developing national political interest in school food programs.

The administration of Canadian school lunch programs is complex (Ruetz & McKenna, 2021). While there is minimal federal or provincial oversight of existing programs (Hernandez et al., 2018), Ruetz & McKenna (2021) estimate that provinces and territories contribute over \$90 million annually to partially support a variety of free school food programs which serve over one in five Canadian students, often implemented in partnership with non-governmental organizations and highly reliant on volunteer labour. Research reveals a diverse array of models for funding and delivery of school food programs across the country, of which only a fraction are lunch programs (Everitt et al., 2020; Ruetz & McKenna, 2021). For example, in British Columbia (BC), the province where this study took place, no specific governmental funding for school lunch programs exists. However, the BC Ministry of Education’s CommunityLINK funding program is intended to support the “academic achievement and social functioning of vulnerable students” and can be used to support school lunch programs at the discretion of eligible schools (Province of British Columbia, 2021, para 1). Some school districts or individual schools also organize their own ad hoc lunch programs using diverse program designs, including those led by parent groups, non-profit organizations, or run by the schools or districts themselves drawing on a mix of funding sources (BC Teachers' Federation, 2015). There remains a notable lack of comprehensive or publicly available data which has documented the number, variety, reach or effectiveness of school lunch programs in BC (Ruetz & McKenna, 2021).

As researchers, grassroots advocates and government actors are now actively debating the importance and future design of Canadian school lunch programs following the Covid-19 pandemic (Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada, 2019; BC Teachers' Federation, 2021; CHSF, 2020), it is imperative to incorporate the voices and perspectives of students. This ethnographic study therefore draws on data collected during thirty-six lunchtimes in three Canadian schools during a transitional period in a school district’s lunch program. New insight is garnered through describing the school lunch experiences of students and staff at three schools before and after the transition to a new district-wide school lunch program. While specific details regarding the two programs’ approaches, funding schemes, administration, uptake and parental perspectives and barriers to use have been published in a public report (Black et al., 2020), the current study findings go beyond the program report to illuminate how food serves as a marker of identity and conduit to dynamic interactions and relationships that shape students’ broader experiences and overall sense of wellbeing and connection. Understanding the intricacies of children’s school lunch experiences, including the relationships, meanings, and values that shape school lunch,

will be critical for creating robust school lunch programs and policies in Canada that better serve the needs of children and reduce rather than reproduce existing health and social inequalities.

Study methods

Study context

This paper draws on fieldwork from three suburban Canadian schools during a district-wide transition from a highly subsidized, in-house lunch program that served a small number of students in each school to a program described as cost-shared and universally accessible, offered to all students through an external catering company (Black et al., 2020). The broader study involved a variety of research methods, including ethnographic observations, in-depth interviews, and a parent survey (Black et al., 2020). This paper draws solely from the ethnographic observations. Ethics approval was obtained from the school district and the University of British Columbia Behavioural Research Ethics Boards.

In June 2017, this school district passed a motion with the aim of nurturing a school district where “no child is hungry and every child eats healthy” (New Westminster Schools, 2018, p. 8). To meet this goal, the district partnered with the local health authority to develop a plan to address documented concerns related to inequitable access to nutritious, culturally appropriate, tasty foods that would be feasible and cost-effective for all eleven schools in the district. In September 2018, a dietitian was hired into the role of School Nutrition Coordinator to support the development, implementation, and evaluation of the meal program. Also in 2018, following a Request for Proposal, the district partnered with a private caterer to develop a lunch program aimed at providing parents with the option to order school lunches through an online ordering system with the aim of addressing the key themes arising from the detailed environmental scan previously developed by the health authority partners in partnership with school district staff (New Westminster Schools, 2018).

The new lunch program was launched at three district schools in February 2019 to provide monthly school lunch menus with a variety of options, including daily vegetarian and gluten-free options. The set cost for all entrées was \$5.75 and optional side dishes (side salad, fruit, or dessert) could be ordered online for \$1.25 to \$1.50. Available drinks included milk (dairy or soy) for \$1.25 and chocolate milk (dairy or soy), offered once per week, for \$1.50. The School Nutrition Coordinator worked closely with the caterer to ensure that menus developed met the Guidelines for Food and Beverage Sales in BC Schools (Province of British Columbia 2013). As part of the program’s commitment to nutritional quality, the menus also ensured that a fruit or vegetable was included with every entrée, that additional fruit and vegetable side dish options were frequently available for purchase, and that milk and milk substitutes could be purchased daily.

Program participation was entirely voluntary, and parents could order meals each day, or for occasional use only. Fifty cents from each full-priced entrée were allocated to support a subsidy program wherein families with significant financial need could submit an application to receive a full or partial subsidy after providing a brief statement of financial or other needs that reduce their family's ability to provide a healthy meal for their child(ren). With approval from a school district staff person, a subsidized family could receive a lunch entrée at no charge (full subsidy) or a partial subsidy where the entrée cost either \$2.75 or \$1.00 (depending on self-reported need). Neither drinks nor side dishes were included as part of the subsidy program but could be purchased for \$1.25 to \$1.50. During the 2018–2019 school year, the subsidy program and approvals were overseen by the School Nourishment Program Coordinator.

In comparison, in the former program, parents previously paid “what they could” through an anonymous envelope payment system with payment details known only by school staff. While the former program was designed to meet the needs of children perceived as vulnerable and in need of support, it was estimated by district staff that only a minority of those previously participating regularly constituted “high needs” students.

Documenting what lunchtime looks like and means to students

We embedded ourselves during lunchtime at two elementary schools and one middle school beginning in early 2019 when the former lunch program was still in place. The schools served families across income levels, with many low- or middle-income students, and English language learners, and reflected the diversity of the district where nearly 40 percent of the population identify as a visible minority on the 2016 Canadian Census (Statistics Canada 2017), including families who identified as South Asian, Chinese, Filipino, First Nations and Metis and other students of colour. There were no lunchrooms or cafeterias in these schools and students had about fifteen to twenty minutes to eat in their classrooms. Teachers occasionally lingered or met with students during lunch but were typically on break during lunchtime. At the elementary schools, one or two select students occasionally left class during lunch to serve as monitors/aides for students in lower grades.

To document students' experiences of lunch before and after the implementation of the new food program, fieldwork was done in January and May 2019. Two classes from the higher grade levels were selected in each of the three schools (two elementary schools and one middle school) for a total of six participating classrooms. In this district, elementary schools serve children up until grades four or five, and some classes combined students in more than one grade level; hence, the oldest classes of students in the classrooms observed ranged from grades three to five in the elementary schools. All students in the middle school were from grade eight. Our rationale for sampling the oldest grades was based on the school district's concerns about stigma in the original lunch program and the presumption that the experiences of stigma would be most

salient or severe for the oldest students. Fieldworkers visited each class six times: three times before the new program was implemented (visits #1, #2, #3) and three times after it had been running for a few months (visits #4, #5, #6). During visits, fieldworkers wrote detailed notes then immediately typed up fieldnotes, which they shared with the research team within forty-eight hours of the visit. Fieldnote excerpts in this paper are true to their original form except for occasional light editing to improve clarity or maintain confidentiality (Emerson et al., 2011). During the third and sixth visits, research assistants accompanied fieldworkers to the classrooms and took before- and after-lunch photos and helped students complete a brief written activity about their lunch. We verbally asked students several questions about lunchtime (e.g., What do you like/not like about lunchtime? What do you think of the new school lunch program? How is it different from the old school lunch program?).

Adult staff, called “noon-hour supervisors,” were hired for one hour shifts during lunchtime and were responsible for roaming the hallways to oversee numerous classrooms at once, monitoring student behaviour and safety issues. These paid staff persons were non-teaching staff, responsible for multiple classes at once, were frequently observed checking in on classrooms and monitoring safety, noise, and behavioural concerns, including ensuring doors were locked/closed appropriately or calming noisy classrooms. While we documented lunchtime conversations and personal and caring interactions between these supervisors and students, for the most part, students were left in their locked classrooms with limited adult supervision.

Description of the lunch programs before and after the meal program transition

The two lunch programs were quite different from one another. More specific data about differences in program participation rates and perceived strengths and limitations of the new program from the perspectives of parents can be found in the publicly available program report (Black et al., 2020). Briefly, the former program was highly subsidized for all participants. Designed with the intent of ensuring that children in low-income households had access to a meal at school, it was supported largely by provincial CommunityLINK funding for vulnerable populations (Province of British Columbia, 2021). Given the limited funding, the program was only available in a small number of district schools and to a limited number of students. Estimates from the district suggest that the previous program had capacity to serve lunches to less than 20 percent of enrolled students. Among students who did regularly participate in the previous program, fewer than one-third were considered to be “vulnerable”, with the district reporting concerns that many families were using the program for “convenience”, with some families in need potentially missing out due to perceived program stigma. Meals were sold below cost, typically less than three dollars per meal, and included a carton of milk and at least one side (e.g., fruit or a bag of crackers or cookies; see for example lunch photos in Figure 1-a). Participating families paid what they could by submitting an envelope to their school with

whatever sum they felt they could afford (including none). Two paid in-house school lunch workers employed by the district coordinated the daily operations of this program, based at one of the elementary schools and the middle school where this research took place, both of which had kitchens similar to large home kitchens. The middle-school lunch worker also prepared lunches for an adjacent elementary school which was another one of our field sites.

The school district implemented a new food program in these three pilot schools in February 2019, which rolled out more widely across the district the following school year. The food for the new program was prepared by an external catering company and delivered by catering staff directly to the schools. The district subsequently eliminated the positions of the two in-house lunch workers, while the noon-hour supervisors remained on staff to monitor students during lunchtime.

Figure 1: School Lunch Photos



Figure Legend:

Figure 1a: Pasta meal from the former school food program prepared by in-house lunch staff; old lunch program (orange border).

Figure 1b: Pasta entrée from the new school food program provided by an external catering company. Students in one class described the new program food as “airplane food” to mean it was made by an anonymous company and felt “less homemade” than food prepared by lunch staff; new lunch program (purple border).

Figure 1c: Home-packed lunches were the most common lunches and often included several items such as a main dish, cookies, or crackers, small sweets, or desserts, and/or fruit; and home-packed lunches (blue border).

Figure 1d: Some students packed and prepared their own lunches, such as heating up prepackaged chicken pot pie.

Figure 1e: Hot entrée of turkey, peas, and gravy from the new school food program. The source of the fruit cup and apple are unknown, as students sometimes supplemented program meals with food brought from home, gifted by, or traded with other students despite a formal policy discouraging students from sharing food.

Figure 1f: Home-packed lunch with apples sliced thinly by Dad the way the student liked them.

Figure 1g: Packed lunch of cheese sandwich and mandarin orange wedges eaten by a student who played a game with another student during lunch.

Figure 1h: Finger foods, such as a cut-up apple sent from home, could be eaten at lunch or during recess.

Figure 1i: Families in one school often dropped off homemade hot lunches at noon, such as this roti wrap.

Figure 1j: Noodle Snacks and other packaged savory and sweet snack foods (e.g., granola bars) from home were popular with students.

Figure 1k: A student smiled upon seeing her favorite, dumplings, in her thermos. How students felt about their food could pervade their entire lunch experience.

Figure 1l: Uneaten food from a packed lunch of pepperoni pizza and watermelon slices.

The new program was described as a universally accessible cost-shared model because all students were invited to order lunch from the new program, whereas the earlier program had capacity limits. Households could apply for a financial subsidy through an online application process. With approval from a school district staff person, a full or partial subsidy could be granted, depending on a family’s self-reported need. The district aimed to approve subsidies for any family who disclosed severe financial hardship or other special circumstances perceived as warranting support. The district did not require formal proof of financial need but asked families to estimate the expected duration for which they would likely need a subsidy. The program further encouraged families to “pay what you can” to assist the district in providing as many healthy meals as possible. While subsidized students could order from the same daily list of

entrees as students paying full price, neither drinks nor side dishes were included as part of the subsidy program but could be purchased at full price by subsidized students.

Data analysis

After several reviews of the fieldnotes and meetings to discuss emergent themes in the data, broad codes were finalized by the academic research team and used to compile and analyze data. Fieldnotes were coded and analyzed using NVivo v.12 in March 2019, prior to the implementation of the new meal program; one additional node was added in May after the program’s implementation (see Table 1). Analyses were complemented by photos from 104 lunches, which revealed the types, quantities, packaging, and variety of foods students brought or purchased, and a small subset is provided in Figure 1 to illustrate the diversity of lunches captured.

Table 1: Analytic Nodes

ADULTROLE	Adult Roles
ATMO	Atmosphere
CLASSMOVE	Classroom movement
EATSTYLE	Styles of eating
FOODLIT	Food Literacy
FOODTALK	Talk about food
FOODTRADE	Swapping, sharing, trading food
FOODTYPE	Food types
HOMEFOOD	Home food
HYGSAFETY	Hygiene and food safety
PACKAGE	Food packaging
PROGFOOD	Program food
SOCDYNAM	Social dynamics
STIGMA	Stigma and food
STUDENTROLE	Student Roles
TIME	Time for lunch
VARIETYMONO	Food monotony/variety
***EXPENSE	Cost, price, expensive/cheap access to subsidy

***denotes node that was added in May 2019 following the implementation of the new program

Results

Eating styles and social interactions at lunch

The fieldwork revealed the highly diverse ways that students approached lunch for both students who brought lunch from home and those participating in the lunch programs. The most common lunches observed were home-packed lunches, which far outnumbered program lunches before and after the district implemented the new program. While the former program had only limited capacity and served the minority of students in these schools, our in-class observations and lunch photographs suggest that in the early months of the new program, school lunch participation appeared to have declined compared to the previous program. Unlike the previous program where parents typically signed up for full month at a time (but at a lower cost, with fewer menu choices), students were more frequently using the new program for only occasional, rather than daily use.

Home lunches usually consisted of a variety of items often separately packed in baggies, reusable containers, or thermoses (Figure 1c-d, f-k) and were more easily distinguishable from the new program packaging, which was distributed in individual packages labelled with students' names (Figure 1b and e). These new program lunches were far more visible and easier to discern from home packed lunches compared to the previous lunch program meals which came in brown paper bags with items more similar in style to home packed foods.

Yet, the story of what food and school lunches in particular meant to students and signaled to others went well beyond what we could see and quantify from the pictures of lunch. Our fieldnotes routinely documented the ways students influenced one another during lunch. Although students ate together in their classrooms, and had about fifteen to twenty minutes for lunch, their eating styles varied dramatically. Some students ate in rapid jags, eating several large bites in a row and sometimes finishing their food quickly. Some took small, measured bites, and ate throughout the lunch period. Some focused on their food while others appeared to be distracted by their peers or activities they were engaging in while they ate, including drawing, playing games, singing, dancing, or chatting with friends. Some students played games with others while eating or sat in a group and ate while socializing, sometimes sharing food as illustrated here, “At one table of three girls, there are grapes being passed around. One girl says she brought them and is sharing with her friends. They say they often share food...[Later I see these students sharing a Danish. At the end of lunch period], I notice that the girl who was sharing her Danish with her two friends is still eating her portion” (Middle school, visit #4).

Social interactions with their peers in the classroom also played an important role in lunchtime dynamics. Students were frequently documented observing their classmates' lunches and were aware of their classmates observing theirs. We documented students “checking in” with classmates as they made eating decisions or when deciding if it was time to speed up their eating

to move onto games or socializing. For example, in one class where students went to music after lunch, a fieldworker observed the following: “One girl is still trying vigorously to chomp through her lunch even though nearly everyone else is now packed up ready to go to music. She is trying to quickly munch some watermelon. Her friend (now speaking in French since this is a French immersion class) comes to speed her along (and I think he says something like “it’s time to finish up”—I wish my French skills were better here). The girl quickly tosses her Tupperware into her lunch bag” (Elementary school, visit #5).

Students’ eating was often informed by their peers, including ideas about what constituted a good lunch and how they actually ate their food. Students knew a lot about what and how their classmates ate, often telling the fieldworkers what their classmates liked to eat and who typically ate what, including whether a classmate participated in the school food program, as this fieldnote excerpt from elementary school, visit #5 depicts “[A group of students say they don’t participate in the program and] point out one student who does get the lunch program (I later learned that this student who was pointed out to me used to get the program lunch, but they no longer do under the new program).]”

Individual and collective identities and cultures signaled with food

Students also actively marked out their identities vis-à-vis food by declaring foods they liked and disliked, describing their eating styles, and displaying knowledge about food, among others. Students’ identity marking around food often involved their peers. At times, students discussed or debated the nutritional quality of foods, as the below exchange illustrates: “Two boys playfully bicker. One says, ‘It’s the best combo of carbs.’ The other replies, ‘Yo, butter chicken is the best!’” (Middle school, visit #6).

Some students displayed an understanding of the value of food items through trading and commenting on others’ items. Ownership and competition for items laid a foundation for several interactions observed among the students, which demonstrated how students actively negotiated to set the value of food. In one elementary class, students hotly debated the worth of an item up for trade, with one rebuffing an offer as too low by exclaiming, “Nothing is free!” (Elementary school, visit #1). However, more often, fieldworkers documented quiet, casual instances of food trading. Students were observed trading a bag of chips for a bun from the old lunch program, or strawberry yogurt for mango yogurt, for example. These kinds of exchanges reveal that students were assessing the value and worth of food items, but also engaging in a cooperative manner to pursue their own cravings and satisfy those of their peers.

Students also participated in peer food culture by knowing about the latest food craze and bringing food from home or buying food that others deemed desirable. Preferences for more “fast food” style foods (chicken sandwiches, burgers, pizza) were common, and students discussed in animated terms popular food items, which tended to be commercial snacks or treats.

“When I tell the boys [a group of students] I’ve never heard of Noodle Snacks, they get very excited. One tells me ‘Everyone wants it’... I ask him, ‘If everyone wants it, is he tempted to trade it?’ He says no with a grin. He likes the noodles too much to trade” (Elementary school, visit #4).

When a fieldworker remarked on the branded sports water bottles on many students’ desks in one middle school class, in another example, a student casually responded, “We get them because we’re rich,” suggesting the water bottles served as markers of status. Students also often commented approvingly on items in their classmates’ lunches that they liked. “A child says in an excited voice, ‘Oh I have a donut too!’ The student next to her says loudly ‘Lucky!’ and slaps the table for emphasis” (Elementary school, visit #3).

These moments publicly marked certain foods as desirable and offered an opportunity for students to trumpet items in their lunch and collectively share enthusiasm for certain foods.

Although we observed moments when children were unhappy about their lunch or appeared to be hiding the contents of their lunch, rarely did we observe students making derogatory comments about their classmates’ lunches, perhaps because of our presence. In one incident, we overheard a small group of students teasing a classmate for bringing leftovers for lunch (Middle school, visit #3), although we regularly observed what appeared to be leftovers among home lunches. We also observed students who appeared upset but did not want to share why with the research team, as the excerpt below demonstrates. a “[A student] is red in the face. Her brow is crinkled, and her eyes are narrowed... I hear her say ‘What did they do to my bag?’... [I] ask if she is okay. She shakes her head no. I ask if there is anything I can do, and she firmly shakes her head again. She then crosses her arms on her desk and rests her head on them” (Elementary school, visit #5). We observed examples of tension and conflict between students on more than one occasion, including instances that might be characterized as bullying. While fieldworkers were not in close enough proximity to the children engaged to hear or record the full context of these incidents or the extent to which they relate to lunch itself, there is evidence that children experience and actively try to avoid bullying and stigma for what they eat at lunch (Best, 2017; Edwards & Taub, 2017; Ludvigsen & Scott, 2009).

Students in classes together often shared similar sentiments about the program food, revealing how students formed collective understandings. In one middle school class (visit #6), students nearly unanimously described the new program as “airplane food,” but we did not hear this term being used elsewhere. In another class, a seemingly popular student who “held court” during lunchtime, with groups of students gathered around his desk, participated in the new program. Students in this class tended to share a positive view of the program. For instance, a classmate told us, “I hear my friends talking about it [the new program] and [they] say it’s good” (Middle school, visit #5). Despite often being asked individually for their impressions of lunchtime, students’ responses revealed how their perceptions were socially formed.

Moreover, students’ perceptions were shaped by more than the food itself; they were informed by ideas about the caring labour of lunch. The students who declared the new program to be like “airplane food,” for example, used this term to also describe food made by an

anonymous, corporate catering company, in contrast with food from the previous program made by the in-house kitchen staff with thought and care. Similarly, a student told us that now that the district had “replaced the cook. It’s [the new catered food] less homemade” (Middle school, visit #4). Yet the catered meals involved more scratch cooking and fewer prepackaged foods than the food made by the lunch staff in the old program. In viewing the catered food as “less homemade” than the former program and akin to “airplane food,” the students were responding less to what was on the menu and more to the relationships behind the food. The lunch worker who used to make their brownbag lunches was widely known and liked by students. The meaning of the food changed for them when they didn’t view it as part of the school’s caring web of support and instead saw it as coming from an unknown, for-profit company.

Food as a site of care and support

Although there was a great deal of variation in how students ate and the meanings they gave to lunch, there were also important commonalities. In particular, students often talked about food as a site of care and support, including being cared for by others through food and not feeling cared for. During our classroom observations, students routinely told us who prepared their lunches and considered their food needs. When a fieldworker commented on how thin and uniform the apple slices were in one elementary school student’s lunch, she said her dad had cut them the way she liked them done. Another told us, her stepmom got her a thermos, indicating the container on her desk, so she now gets a hot lunch with bread (Elementary school, visit #3). Students didn’t just describe receiving care, they also talked about caring for others through lunch, including by packing their own lunch. For example, an elementary student said she always packed her lunch rather than getting food from the lunch program. She explained that it was easier for her to get her own lunch. She quickly added that it was fun to pack her own lunch (Elementary school, visit #5). The student’s response that it was easier for her suggests that she packed her own lunches to help her family. She may have added that she enjoyed doing this labour out of a perception that the fieldworker would negatively judge her family for not packing her lunch and a desire to protect them from such judgment. In another example, when asked what he’d heard about the new program, one elementary student replied, “I wish I could try it!” His mom said it was too expensive, he explained, adding that his family already paid quite a bit for his sports interests (listing four different sports he does), indicating an awareness of the limits of his family’s budget and the kinds of trade-offs they must make, even while stressing the ways they prioritized his interests (Elementary school, visit #5).

It became clear that, in addition to food, social relationships and care work were a major part of school lunch. For instance, a fieldworker chatted with a woman holding a lunch bag in the front reception area of one of the elementary schools and learned that she was there to drop off lunch to her nephew: “I ask her if she is delivering food to a student and she laughs and says yes, explaining, ‘He wants to pick it up from me to get hugs!’ She is the boy’s aunt and says she

delivers his meal by hand Monday through Friday. She emphasizes what a big undertaking this is, stressing that she does this Monday through Friday at least twice while laughing. ‘He wants it hand delivered,’ she says. Then she adds, ‘They want hot food’” (Elementary school, visit #4).

Both the former and new lunch program included a diversity of entrées including some hot or warm options (e.g., wraps and hot pasta dishes in the old program and a variety of entrées served in foil containers and kept warm until delivery in the new program). Yet, despite the opportunity to purchase hot food from the catered lunch, this excerpt reveals that a great deal of time, thought and care went into lunch, involving attending to a child’s food and emotional needs. Students also talked about parents who included their favorite items in their lunch or knew exactly how to prepare their food. Children’s responses showed appreciation for the practical and caring work of home-packed lunches.

Sometimes students expressed frustration about their lunch. An elementary school student whose mom “mostly” packed his lunch said he had cucumbers daily, but they were “not my favourite” and “after a while of eating them, they don’t taste as good” (Elementary school, visit #4). Another elementary student whose mother dropped off hot lunch every day, complained that he always received the same lunch and “doesn’t like his food anymore.” When asked what he likes most about lunchtime, he replied, “Nothing” (Elementary school, visit #3). This example illustrates how much the caring work of lunch mattered to students. The student’s response indicated he did not feel cared for during lunch and this negatively affected his entire lunchtime experience. In contrast, students who were pleased with what they had for lunch demonstrated happiness and could be seen contentedly eating the food. “I ask [a student] if she has a favorite lunch and she says, ‘Dumplings.’ As she says this, she is opening her Dora the Explorer thermos and I see that it is full of dumplings. She smiles...Later, I see her eating dumplings out of her thermos with her hand” (Elementary school, visit #3).

In addition to talking about the caring work that students themselves or family members did to make daily lunches, the fieldwork conducted after the new food program was implemented highlighted the care work of the lunch staff who oversaw the former program. Students in the two schools with a dedicated lunch worker expressed how much they missed them, even if they had not participated in the former program themselves. For example, a fieldworker spoke with a group of middle-school students, including one with no lunch, after the new program had been implemented and wrote the following: “I don’t see this student with any lunch, and he and his fellow students start talking about how challenging it is for students who don’t have a strong support network. They say, ‘Some kids don’t have any food.’ These students were supported by the old program and felt like they could always go to [the former lunch staff] if they didn’t have time (or their parents didn’t have time) to pack a lunch. ‘Now you just have to starve’” (Middle school, visit #6).

This vignette points to the appreciation students had for adults who prepared meals and looked out for their food needs, at school and at home. Students described how extras from the former program would be distributed around the school, with the lunch staff adept at figuring out how to get food to hungry students. Other students fondly recalled being able to do volunteer

hours in the kitchen with the lunch staff. We also observed paper lunch bags from the previous program with personalized notes on them, and many students talked about the care and thoughtfulness of the lunch workers in knowing them, their preferences and caring for them. At the elementary school where students did not have a dedicated in-house lunch worker, there was still evidence that the lunch worker who prepared the students' brownbag lunches from the kitchen at the middle school made an effort to show care for the elementary school students. For example, a fieldworker wrote the following: "I noticed that the lunch bag [from the meal program] had the note 'have a nice day' written on it. I asked the student if there are always notes on the bag, and she said, 'only sometimes.' She also indicated that yesterday the bag had a star on it" (Elementary school, visit #3).

Overall, our fieldwork underscored that school lunchtimes are not just about food, they are also about nurturing relationships and connecting students with trusted adults. The removal of the lunch staff with the introduction of the new lunch program, staffed by an external catering company housed off campus and ordered by parents online, left a care gap in the schools. Unlike the in-house lunch staff from the former program, catering company staff from the new program had little direct contact with students or their families. We saw students with moldy home lunch, with no lunch, or with meager lunches. Particularly after the new program was implemented, students did not seem to know who to turn to for help when they needed it and expressed longing for the former lunch workers.

We also documented moments of connection between adults and students during lunch. Noon-hour supervisors and teachers reported wanting to know and support students' nutritional needs (e.g., one teacher had a supply of granola bars or other snacks on hand for a student who would otherwise not have lunch). Noon-hour supervisors were overheard engaging with students, including joking around with them and attempting to get to know them and their food needs. Yet supervisors were stretched thin, as this vignette describes: "A [noon-hour supervisor] drops by and talks to some of the students while bouncing on an exercise ball. I overheard her explaining that she can't just stay and only talk to them, there are over 400 other students that she has to see (or something to that effect)" (Elementary school, visit #2).

School staff also bemoaned the loss of the lunch staff and described struggling to know how to support students who received the wrong lunch order or were missing lunch.

[A noon-hour supervisor] laments the loss of [the staff person who oversaw the old program]. She says that [the former lunch staff person] knew the students and their specific dietary needs in a way that the new online ordering system doesn't. She gives examples of mistakes that would have been caught but the online ordering doesn't/can't. For example, a vegetarian student accidentally got a BLT [bacon, lettuce, and tomato sandwich] (potentially due to a mistake in ordering). The child couldn't eat the lunch and didn't want to eat the sandwich with the bacon removed and only told the lunch monitor [about the mistake] days later. She told him that next time he should tell someone right away (or she suggested swapping with another student who had a vegetarian lunch)

rather than going hungry because he had no lunch to eat. She seemed very concerned that a student couldn't eat and didn't have any lunch that day because of a technical error which was missed. [She describes other errors she's observed in the new program and]...wonders if there's a way someone can double check these kinds of errors or "self-correct."
(Elementary school, visit #4)

Overall, our fieldwork reveals students' and school staff's awareness of the important role and value of strong support network[s] for addressing the barriers some students experienced in accessing school lunch, and the pitfalls when caring supports were insufficient to meet students' needs.

Discussion

This study underscores the richness and value of recording students' firsthand experiences during lunchtime, demonstrating how students connected through food, making sense of the care they both received and gave through the labour of lunch, and how this caring work informed students' perceptions of the food itself (Ludvigsen & Scott, 2009; McPhail et al. 2011). Pairing photos with ethnographic observations showed both the diversity and commonalities of foods consumed at lunchtime. This study illuminated how children wrap school lunch in layers of social and symbolic meanings that are about the food, but also surpass it as lunchtime was a time for learning, connecting, and meaning-making (Beagan et al., 2015; Chapman et al., 2011; Johnston & Baumann, 2014). While there are few comparable studies from Canada, our findings echo and extend a large body of international literature on the promises and challenges of school food programs for addressing childhood hunger, nutrition, care work, and social inclusion (Best, 2017; Gaddis, 2019; Poppendieck, 2010; Raine et al., 2003).

Like many existing meal programs in Canada (Everitt et al., 2020), the new program documented here was developed chiefly to address inequitable food access and the healthfulness of children's diets. Yet, the experiences of lunch for children went well beyond the nutritional quality or composition of lunches. In particular, children and adults demonstrated care for one another through food, and students expressed their awareness of and appreciation for those who care for them, including the previous school lunch staff, through the meanings they gave to food. Knowing who made their food and feeling cared for and recognized by them, positively shaped students' perceptions of lunch. Conversely, for some, not knowing who performed the labour of lunch or not feeling cared for or valued through it, led to negative perceptions of the food. Future lunch program developers will need to be attuned to these issues as parents and students may opt out of meal programs if they perceive that their social, emotional or nutritional needs are better served by sending a packed lunch from home (Black et al., 2020; Niimi-Burch, 2021).

These findings also reinforce the importance of thoughtfully including the perspectives of children in school food research and program design (Pole et al., 1999; Wills, 2012). These

findings revealed the subtle ways that students' food choices, perceptions of the new lunch program, and lunchtime interactions reflect the multilayered and textured ways food intersected with their senses of identity, belonging, and connection with peers and adults in ways that were largely overlooked by school district staff and meal program designers. For example, the design of the new lunch program aimed to maintain the anonymity of students whose meals were subsidized, with the goal of reducing stigma for subsidized children and families. However, fieldwork revealed that students had in-depth knowledge of what their peers ate, who regularly received school lunch and where classmates' food came from.

Findings highlight one of the challenges schools face in efforts to mitigate stigma associated with targeted or subsidized school meals. Students' comments revealed several cases where the district's attempts to maintain the anonymity of students receiving subsidized meals likely failed. While the previous program provided little choice to students, in the new program, full paying students could select from a range of entrees and à la carte drink and treat options. Whereas students receiving subsidized lunches were only provided access to the entrée dish and neither drinks, such as milk, or desserts were subsidized. Students appeared to have in-depth knowledge about their classmates' eating patterns and preferences, and parents who were not using the subsidy program often ordered only infrequently and used the program to treat their children. Thus, even though all students received the same brown bagged lunch regardless of how much they paid in the original program, we suspect that students within most classes could, with relative ease, deduce which students were using the subsidy program in the new program (Black et al., 2020). Literature from the United States has previously documented the many complex obstacles that can be enacted by school lunch programs to participation including challenges in applying for and accessing meals, price barriers and stigma attached to receiving subsidized meals (Poppendieck, 2010). Despite the stated goal of being "universally-accessible", the overall frequency of ordering from the school lunch program declined after the introduction of the new program, and the subsidy program did not reach many potentially vulnerable students (Black et al., 2020). We therefore find that these key barriers, including ensuring access regardless of ability to pay and stigma related to accessing program subsidies, remain important considerations in the development of school lunch programs.

Still, current findings suggest that school lunch programs have the potential to deliver more than just food as these findings highlighted ways that school lunches can contribute to the collective care of students at school. Yet, to do so, the caring labour of feeding others and taking the time to know, see, and support students' food and care needs must be recognized and valued as a part of school food programs (Gaddis, 2019). While there is no robust publicly available measure of the funding for or availability of paid school food staff in Canada or British Columbia, a recent survey of school food programs across Canada suggests that the majority of provinces and territories are heavily reliant on volunteer labour and in-kind contributions from non-governmental partners (Ruetz & McKenna, 2021). The value of care work and meaningful relationships formed between students and the former program's food workers did not appear to be on the school district's radar and was not part of the formal job duties of teachers or noon-

hour supervisors who were chiefly responsible for monitoring safety and promoting acceptable student behaviour during lunchtime. However, this research demonstrates the many ways children felt the loss when the in-house lunch workers' positions were eliminated following the transition to an externally catered food program.

Caring through food involves intergenerational and peer relations, and our findings show how school policies and environments can facilitate *and* impede such relations. Care work should not be invisible, pushed to the margins, or fall to the extraordinary efforts of a few who go beyond the mandates of their job to try to fill care gaps. This study was co-designed with school district staff and local public health professionals and, in retrospect, overlooked seeking input from and incorporating the firsthand experiences of the in-house lunch staff who prepared and served meals, before their positions were eliminated, which was an important limitation of our work. Future school food research and monitoring efforts would be well served to explicitly describe the work of parents, volunteers and paid staff who are the forefront of ensuring students' food needs are cared for. While Reutz and McKenna (2021) have recently added to the literature by documenting the heavy reliance of Canadian school food programs on volunteers and non-governmental organizational partnership, the fulsome valuation and impact of this still largely undocumented food work remains pivotal for revealing the full potential of future school food initiatives (Gaddis, 2019). Further, inclusion of student-centred perceptions is an essential next step in developing future school lunch programs for Canada. Thus, additional research should focus more on student perceptions as collected in ethnographic and written student input to better inform program and policy development which includes a student-centred approach.

Conclusion

A major lesson learned from this research is that students need access to nutritious meals at school that nourish their bodies but also their sense of being cared for, valued, and recognized. By centering students' actions and voices in their classroom settings, and with supporting insights from adults involved in school lunch and photographic images of lunches, we show the powerful role of students' perceptions of and relationships to food and those who care for their food needs in shaping their social interactions, as well as their sense of care, connection, and identity. Understanding the intricacies of children's school lunch experiences, including the relationships, meanings, and values that shape school lunch will be critical for creating robust school food programs and policies in Canada that better serve the needs of children and reduce rather than reproduce existing health and social inequalities.

Acknowledgements: This study was funded by a Partnership Engage Grant from the Social Science and Humanities Research Council of Canada. We thank all members of the school district's School Nourishment Program Evaluation Committee for their valuable input and Iris Lopez Ramirez who contributed to valuable analysis of the school lunch photographs. We could not have completed this project without the support of the administrators, lunch workers, teachers, staff, parents and families who welcomed us into their classrooms and shared their insights about school lunch. We are grateful that this project gave us the opportunity to learn from and with Sinikka Elliott and we dedicate this nourishing work to her.

References

- Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada. (2019). *Food policy for Canada*.
<https://www.canada.ca/content/dam/aafc-aac/documents/20190614-en.pdf>.
- Anderson, M. L., Gallagher, J., & Ritchie, E. R. (2017). *School lunch quality and academic performance*. NBER Working Papers 23218. National Bureau of Economic Research, Inc.
- Arteaga, I., & Heflin, C. (2014). Participation in the National School Lunch Program and food security: An analysis of transitions into kindergarten. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 47(3), 224-230. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.childyouth.2014.09.014>
- BC Teachers' Federation. (2015). *Hungry students in BC public schools and the adequacy of school meal programs to support them*. Poverty and education survey: A teacher's perspective.
- BC Teachers' Federation. (2021). *Healthy, resilient schools: Cornerstones of community and COVID-19 recovery*. Education funding brief June 2020.
<https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED606478.pdf>
- Beagan, B. L., Power, E. M., & Chapman, G. E. (2015). "Eating isn't just swallowing food": Food practices in the context of social class trajectory. *Canadian Food Studies/La Revue canadienne des études sur l'alimentation*, 2(1), 75-98. <http://dx.doi.org/10.15353/cfs-rcea.v2i1.50>
- Best, A. L. (2017). *Fast-food kids: French fries, lunch lines and social ties* (Vol. 4). NYU Press.
- Bhatia, R., Jones, P., & Reicker, Z. (2011). Competitive foods, discrimination, and participation in the national school lunch program. *American Journal of Public Health*, 101(8), 1380-1386. <https://doi.org/10.2105/AJPH.2011.300134>
- Black, J. L., Elliott, S., Heckelman, A., & Mazac, R. (2020). *SD40 School nourishment program 2018-2019 report: Insights about school lunch experiences from three schools with pre-existing lunch programs during the 2019 transition to the Fuel Up! School nourishment*

programin New Westminster. <https://lfs-jblack.sites.olt.ubc.ca/files/2020/10/BC-School-Lunch-Program-Full-Report-June-2020.pdf>

- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). (1996). *Guidelines for school health programs to promote lifelong healthy eating*. MMWR. Recommendations and reports : Morbidity and mortality weekly report. Recommendations and reports, 45(RR-9), 1–41. http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/entrez/query.fcgi?cmd=Retrieve&db=PubMed&dopt=Citation&list_uids=8637498
- Chapman, G. E., Ristovski-Slijepcevic, S., & Beagan, B. L. (2011). Meanings of food, eating and health in Punjabi families living in Vancouver, Canada. *Health Education Journal*, 70(1), 102-112. <https://doi.org/10.1177%2F0017896910373031>
- Cohen, J. F. W., Hecht, A. A., McLoughlin, G. M., Turner, L., & Schwartz, M. B. (2021). Universal school meals and associations with student participation, attendance, academic performance, diet quality, food security, and body mass index: A systematic review. *Nutrients*, 13(3), 911. <https://doi.org/10.3390/nu13030911>
- Edwards, O. W., & Taub, G. E. (2017). Children and youth perceptions of family food insecurity and bullying. *School mental health*, 9(3), 263-272.
- Emerson, R. M., Fretz, R. I., & Shaw, L. L. (2011). *Writing ethnographic fieldnotes*. University of Chicago Press.
- Everitt, T., Engler-Stringer, R., & Martin, W. (2020). Determining promising practices for Canadian school food programs: A scoping review. *Journal of Hunger & Environmental Nutrition*, 1-20. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19320248.2020.1823925>
- Gaddis, J. E. (2019). *The labor of lunch: Why we need real food and real jobs in American public schools (Vol. 70)*. University of California Press.
- Government of Canada. (2019). *Chapter 4: Delivering real change*. Budget 2019. <https://budget.gc.ca/2019/docs/plan/chap-04-en.html>
- Greenhalgh, T., Kristjansson, E., & Robinson, V. (2007). Realist review to understand the efficacy of school feeding programmes. *BMJ*, 335(7625), 858-861. <https://doi.org/10.1136/bmj.39359.525174.AD>
- Gundersen, C. (2015). Food assistance programs and child health. *The Future of Children*, 25(1), 91-109.
- Hernandez, K., Engler-Stringer, R., Kirk, S., Wittman, H., & McNicholl, S. (2018). The case for a Canadian national school food program. *Canadian Food Studies*, 5(3), 208-229. <https://doi.org/10.15353/cfs-rcea.v5i3.260>

- Hinrichs, P. (2010). The effects of the National School Lunch Program on education and health. *Journal of Policy Analysis and Management*, 29(3), 479-505.
<https://doi.org/10.1002/pam.20506>
- Jaime, P. C., & Lock, K. (2009). Do school based food and nutrition policies improve diet and reduce obesity? *Preventive Medicine*, 48(1), 45-53.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ypmed.2008.10.018>
- Johnston, J., & Baumann, S. (2014). *Foodies: Democracy and distinction in the gourmet foodscape*. Routledge.
- Liberal Party of Canada. (2021). *School nutrition and healthy eating*. Forward, for everyone.
<https://liberal.ca/our-platform/school-nutrition-and-healthy-eating/>.
- Ludvigsen, A., & Scott, S. (2009). Real kids don't eat quiche: what food means to children. *Food, Culture & Society*, 12(4), 417-436. <https://doi.org/10.2752/175174409X456728>
- McIntyre, L., Travers, K., & Dayle, J. B. (1999). Children's feeding programs in Atlantic Canada: reducing or reproducing inequities? *Can J Public Health*, 90(3), 196-200.
<https://doi.org/10.1007/bf03404506>
- McIsaac, J. D., Read, K., Williams, P. L., Raine, K. D., Veugelers, P. J., & Kirk, S. F. L. (2018). Reproducing or reducing inequity? Considerations for School Food Programs. *Canadian Journal of Dietetic Practice and Research*, 79(1), 18-22. <https://doi.org/10.3148/cjdpr-2017-029>
- McKenna, M. L. (2010). Policy options to support healthy eating in schools. *Canadian Journal of Public Health*, 101(Suppl 2), S14-17. <https://doi.org/10.1007/BF03405619>
- McPhail, D., Chapman, G. E., & Beagan, B. L. (2011). "Too much of that stuff can't be good": Canadian teens, morality, and fast food consumption. *Social Science & Medicine*, 73(2), 301-307. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.socscimed.2011.05.022>
- New Westminster Schools. (2018). *Board of education SD NO. 40 (NEW WESTMINSTER): Operations Policy and Planning Committee Meeting Report and Supplements*.
<https://newwestschools.ca/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/180116-OPEN-Ops-Agenda.pdf>
- Niimi-Burch, S. (2021). Middle class mothers' experiences and perceptions of school lunch: labour, care, and responsibility. [Master's thesis, University of British Columbia]. Open Collections: UBC Theses and Dissertations. <https://dx.doi.org/10.14288/1.0406189>
- Pais, M. S., & Bissell, S. (2006). Overview and implementation of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. *The Lancet*, 367(9511), 689-690. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736\(06\)68267-6](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736(06)68267-6)

- Pole, C., Mizen, P., & Bolton, A. (1999). Realising children's agency in research: partners and participants? *International Journal of Social Research Methodology*, 2(1), 39-54. <https://doi.org/10.1080/136455799295177>
- Poppendieck, J. (2010). *Free for all: fixing school food in America*. University of California Press.
- Province of British Columbia. (2013). *Guidelines for food and beverage sales in BC schools*. Ministry of Health, Population and Public Health Division and Ministry of Education. https://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/education/administration/kindergarten-to-grade-12/healthyschools/2015_food_guidelines.pdf
- Province of British Columbia. (2021). CommunityLINK funding information. <https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/education-training/k-12/administration/program-management/communitylink>
- Raine, K., McIntyre, L., & Dayle, J. B. (2003). The failure of charitable school- and community-based nutrition programmes to feed hungry children. *Critical Public Health*, 13(2), 155-169. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0958159031000097634>
- Ralston, K., Treen, K., Coleman-Jensen, A., & Guthrie, J. (2017). *Children's food security and USDA child nutrition programs*. United States Department of Agriculture. <https://www.ers.usda.gov/webdocs/publications/84003/eib-174.pdf?v=2510.2>
- Ruetz, A. T., & McKenna, M. L. (2021). Characteristics of Canadian school food programs funded by provinces and territories. *Canadian Food Studies*, 8(3). <https://doi.org/10.15353/cfs-rcea.v8i3.483>
- Statistics Canada. (2017). *New Westminster, CY [Census subdivision], British Columbia and British Columbia [Province] (table)*. *Census Profile*. 2016 Census. Statistics Canada Catalogue no. 98-316-X2016001. Ottawa. Released November 29, 2017. <https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2016/dp-pd/prof/index.cfm?Lang=E> (accessed April 1, 2022).
- The Coalition for Healthy School Food (CHSF). (2020). Our guiding principles. <https://www.healthyschoolfood.ca/guiding-principles>.
- Tugault-Lafleur, C. N., Black, J. L., & Barr, S. I. (2017). Lunch-time food source is associated with school hour and school day diet quality among Canadian children. *Journal of Human Nutrition and Dietetics*, 31(1), 96-107. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jhn.12500>
- Veugelers, P. J., & Schwartz, M. E. (2010). Comprehensive school health in Canada. *Canadian Journal of Public Health*, 101(Suppl 2), S5-8. <https://doi.org/10.1007/bf03405617>

Wills, W. J. (2012). Using spoken and written qualitative methods to explore children's and young people's food and eating practices. *Sociological Research Online*, 17(3), 114-123.
<https://doi.org/10.5153%2Fsro.2670>

World Health Organization (WHO). (2020). Health promoting schools.
https://www.who.int/health-topics/health-promoting-schools#tab=tab_1



Book Review

Eat local, taste global: how ethnocultural food reaches our tables

By Glen C. Filson and Bamidale Adekunle
Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2017: 190 pages

Review by Regan Zink*

Eat Local, Taste Global: How Ethnocultural Food Reaches our Tables addresses the demand, availability, and production of ethnocultural vegetables in the Greater Toronto and Hamilton Area (GTHA). The book is centered around the three largest ethnic groups in the GTHA (Chinese, South Asian, Afro-Caribbean) and considers histories of immigration, acculturation, and the availability of ethnocultural food. Taken as a whole, this book provides an overview and justification for the local production of ethnocultural vegetables. While this book is primarily based in the Southern Ontario context, there is some discussion of ethnocultural vegetable value chains in other parts of Canada and the USA. Further, Filson and Adekunle distinguish between the corporate food regime, characterized by longer value chains, and local and community level food sovereignty which are primarily discussed through farmers' markets, community shared agriculture, and gardening. The authors cite numerous benefits of producing ethnocultural vegetables in Southern Ontario, including economic, health, social, and environmental benefits. They argue that ethnocultural vegetables are not only fresher and more nutritious when produced locally, but there is also increased opportunity for producer-consumer contact and lower transportation costs associated with local production.

The book is organized into seven chapters that consider a myriad of perspectives related to ethnocultural vegetable value chains. Topics covered in the chapters include: political economy; demographic preferences; a value chain analysis; consumption of culturally appropriate food; inclusivity of farmers' markets, or lack thereof; community shared agriculture; and the health and economic benefits of producing ethnocultural vegetables locally. Filson and Adekunle, clearly link the growing demand for culturally appropriate food with the potential to produce ethnocultural vegetables, such as okra, Chinese or Indian long eggplant, yard-long beans, and bok choy, among others, in Ontario. It is important to note that the scope of this work is limited to Chinese, South Asian, and Afro-Caribbean ethnocultural vegetables and interesting

*Corresponding author: zinkr@uoguelph.ca

to reflect that this includes vegetables that are more commonly known in Ontario such as onions and potatoes.

In their work, Filson and Adekunle address the contradictions and challenges associated with the provision of ethnocultural vegetables. This includes Canada's reliance on the Seasonal Agricultural Worker Program for farm labour, the prevalence of anglophone and Dutch Canadian farmers, the current relatively limited production of ethnocultural vegetables locally, and the tensions between industrial agriculture and small-operation farmers. The book also addresses contradictions in retail settings including the location of grocery retail and access to ethnocultural vegetables, the dynamic between global supermarkets and independent ethnic stores, and consumers' desire for healthy, fresh produce despite the time and distance most fruit and vegetable travels before reaching their table. These contradictions, the authors argue, contribute to unsustainable ethnocultural supply chains.

To address these contradictions and challenges, several recommendations and policy changes are provided. Many of these are directed at municipal and provincial governments, but this book also provides important insight for producers, consumers, and retailers. Addressing larger systemic issues of economic inequality and human rights, Filson and Adekunle call for creating space and providing support for non-white farmers, including food preferences in Canadian human rights codes, and supporting the development and approval of inputs (fertilizers and pesticides) specifically for ethnocultural vegetables. Other recommendations include the use of multiple languages on signs for ethnocultural vegetables in retail settings and the creation of an organization to represent ethnocultural vegetable producers in Ontario. Specific to policy making, the authors argue that municipal bylaws, intended to prevent fragmentation of agricultural land, are a barrier for small producers looking to lease or purchase a small parcel of land.

This book offers important insights for a variety of stakeholders, including policy makers, consumers, producers, and researchers, and is written using language that is accessible to many of these groups. Filson and Adekunle provide background information on concepts such as ethnicity, acculturation, transnationalism, food security, and functional foods in the context of discussing ethnocultural vegetables. Each of the chapters clearly address the role of power in shaping the agri-food sector today.

Discussion and analysis around the role of farmers markets and community shared agriculture was particularly insightful and highlighted the importance of farm-to-table relationships and the role of alternative markets in supporting opportunities to produce ethnocultural vegetables in Ontario. As a Guelph resident, I have noticed some community shared agriculture programs introducing ethnocultural vegetables, such as diakon radish, kobocha squash, and napa cabbage, over the past couple of years. Filson and Adekunle position alternative food systems as having the most potential to support the production of ethnocultural vegetables locally. Circling back to the contradictions and challenges related to the provision of ethnocultural vegetables there are several access issues associated with alternative food systems today.

Eat local, taste global: how ethnocultural food reaches our tables provides an excellent overview of Chinese, South Asian, and Afro-Caribbean ethnocultural vegetable value chains in the Greater Toronto and Hamilton Area. After reading this book I cannot help but wonder how things have changed since 2017 and how this information translates to other parts of Ontario and Canada. Additionally, there is the opportunity to address how Indigenous food fits into this discussion. As a rural studies scholar and planner, I see great potential for the production of ethnocultural vegetables. Local and regional production of food including culturally appropriate food, contributes to food sovereignty, resilience, and wellbeing of rural and urban populations.

Regan Zink is an Arrell Food Institute Scholar and PhD student in the Rural Studies program at the University of Guelph. Her research is related to regional governance and agri-food systems.

Canadian Food Studies



La Revue canadienne des
études sur l'alimentation

c/o Department of Health Sciences

Lakehead University

955 Oliver Road

Thunder Bay (ON) P7B 5E1

ISSN: 2292-3071

canadianfoodstudies.ca