

Broadening Discourse and Centering Social Justice: Struggles for a More Just Food System in Seattle, Washington

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Abstract

This paper demonstrates the need for a more holistic and anti-racist approach to local alternative food practice in the U.S. that would aim to meet the needs of the most marginalized: women, people of color, low-income peoples, immigrant peoples, and rural/small-farm holders. First, I define three major food discourses: community/food security, food sovereignty and food justice. Second, I focus on the current state and framing of the food alternatives system and network of emergency food resources in Seattle, WA. Third, I add to previous work done about space, whiteness, and privilege in the food alternatives movement and its exclusionary practices. Lastly, I consider conceptualizations of privilege and whiteness in order to critique the three aforementioned discourses. The goal of this paper is to widen the language of local alternative food work and create a framework that would aim to meet the autonomy and needs of those disproportionately affected by industrial food practices.

Introduction

Urban centers in the United States have become localities of place-based opposition to the corporate and industrialized food system. Seattle, Washington is an urban center at the forefront of the movement with thriving grassroots, community-based solutions, local and regional policy and initiatives and allocated financial support from the local government. Accompanying these alternative food system “solutions” is a large network of emergency food resources such as food banks and hot meal programs. These programs are often framed within a discourse of food security. This framing has implications for resource allocation, empowerment, self-reliance, and autonomy/sovereignty, particularly for historically (and perpetually) marginalized people like women, people of color, immigrant peoples, and low-income neighborhoods.¹

Considering that low-income and racially/ethnically diverse communities are those who disproportionately face “food insecurity” in

¹ There is much overlap between many of the communities because of the processes of marginalization. For example, in low-income neighborhoods there usually are disproportionate numbers of people of color and immigrant people.

urban centers, it is important that these communities are involved and central to the food discussions because marginalized peoples are usually the ones most negatively affected or just forgotten in these discussions (“AFPCFoodAccess”). Moreover, many community food organizations remain unaware or closed to the ways that racism works within food systems and the food alternatives movement. These groups, rather, stress community and self-sufficiency and overlook, intentionally or unintentionally, the intersecting feature of class, gender, and race within the food system (“Anti-racist Practice” 330).

In this paper I seek to critically focus on several points. Firstly, language and framing are crucial particularly when engaged in struggles for social justice. Therefore, I ground and historicize three major food discourses: community/food security, food sovereignty, and food justice. By doing so can open up a discussion in term of their implications for justice, basic human rights, understanding our relationship with food and one another, and the empowerment and self-reliance specifically of low-income and racially/ethnically diverse communities. Secondly, I outline the current state of the food system in Seattle, Washington, focusing on emergency food resources and food alternatives. This is important so to ground physically the discussions of language and framing and revealing privilege. Thirdly, community/food security, food sovereignty, and food justice are considered and critiqued. Fourthly, drawing from geographers and other whiteness scholars, I consider space, privilege, and whiteness in the food alternative movement in order to put this in conversation with the critiquing of the discourse. Lastly, drawing from the aforementioned discussions about space, privilege, whiteness, and the critiques of food alternative systems and the three food discourses, I hope to broaden and help shape a more comprehensive and anti-oppressive framework that will center the needs of those negatively affected by our current food system and whom are at times neglected/overlooked in current food work.

Methods

The methods I used are complimentary and relevant to the gathering of appropriate data for my project. I utilized three methods: literature review, web-based research, and archival research which is also dominantly web-based.

Based on the current literature available, I gathered the historical context and subsequent development of the three food discourses community/food security, food sovereignty and food justice (academic literature available about this particular discourse is sparse). Furthermore, I gathered current work being done by geographers

focusing on whiteness and spatial privilege within the food alternatives system. Web-based research is important because food communities have a large web-based presence.

One of the guiding questions of the project is: What is the current state of Seattle's food alternative system and emergency food networks? The creation of a map was most appropriate to depict these alternatives. Therefore, I reviewed umbrella organizations such as Puget Sound Fresh and the Neighborhood Farmers Market Alliance to retrieve the most updated information and locations of current farmers markets and food alternatives in the Seattle area. The City of Seattle web pages proved informational when gathering the locations of emergency resources in Seattle, including food banks and referral programs. I also examined blog networks and pages to gather sites of "unconventional" means of food access such as dumpster diving sites and gleaning locations.

In order to analyze these sources, I used two analytical methods. One, spatial pattern and relationship analysis, and two, discourse analysis. After creating a map depicting Seattle's current food alternatives and emergency food resources, I compared and contrasted this with that of the *Acting Food Policy Council's* (AFPC) food insecurity map shown in their Issue Paper No. 4, "Mapping Food Insecurity and Access in Seattle and King County." Finally, I used discourse analysis to outline and analyze the three food discourses.

Contextualizing and Defining the Discourse

It's necessary and important to define both the context in which community/food security, food sovereignty and food justice have come about as well as their literal definitions. Language and resultant discourse creation processes have political, social, economic, and cultural implications. Those discourses which become dominant for and through various reasons influence particular realms such as policy and resource allocation. For one, language is highly open to interpretation based on numerous factors. One's class, gender, and culture are critical to the way one interprets. Therefore, words must be carefully and sensitively put side by side one another. Language and discourses represent underlying values and biases. For example, they may portray ideas of what are good food practices and how one should view and carry out their relationship with food. Language and discourse both carry baggage and embedded meaning whether one is cognizant of these implied assumptions or not. This is critical to understand, especially when considering the unnamed and unclaimed privileges within the food alternatives movement and the discourses framing this movement.

Community/Food Security

The concept of food security was first introduced in 1974 at the United Nations World Food Conference. It soon became central to policy in many “developing”² countries as it was declared that the “right to freedom from hunger was an inalienable right” (Allen 21). Food Security,

...exists when all people, at all times, have physical and economic access to safe and nutritious food which meets their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life (“First Feed the Face” 196; Patel 90; Windfuhr and Jonsén 21).

In the 1980s, the U.S. adopted the food security framework. At the World Food Summit in 1996, there was increasing attention to the right of food and quality rather than quantity became the focus (Allen 21).

The framework of food security took a turn in the U.S. in the context of the Rodney King verdict in 1992 which brought to light the inequalities facing the Black community and food issues facing South Central Los Angeles communities. People became more concerned with food access, quality, as well as affordability. Out of this context, the concept of *community food security* was defined as a condition in which “...all persons obtaining at all times a culturally acceptable, nutritionally adequate diet through local non-emergency sources (Allen 21; Campbell 346; “Community Food Security” 24; “First Feed the Face”). With the formation of the Community Food Security Coalition (CFSC) in 1996, came a refined definition which extended the previous definition to include, “...through a sustainable food system that maximizes community self-reliance and social justice” (“Community Food Security Coalition”).

The CFSC claims that community food security is a comprehensive strategy aimed to address the “ills affecting our society and environment due to an unsustainable and unjust food system.” Grounding community food security are six principles addressing “low-income food needs,” increasing poverty and hunger, the disappearing of farmland, environmental pollution, community resource building, and stabilizing a local agricultural base to build stronger ties between farmers and consumers so that “consumers gain a greater knowledge and appreciation for their food source” (“Community Food Security Coalition”)

² “developing” is placed in quotations because, although I disagree with the political and social ramifications of the use of “developing,” moreover the concept of “development,” it frames the context in which food security was introduced and thus is critical to its current understandings and implementation.

Both food security and community food security have become dominant discourses not only to describe the work being done in the food alternatives movement but also as a critique of the unsustainable industrialized food system. Although they are the most predominant circulating food discourses, food sovereignty has been recognized on more inter/transnational levels that acknowledge and center the struggles of landless peasants and small-holder farmers.

Food Sovereignty

The concept of food sovereignty was collectively envisioned by La Vía Campesina and was brought to international attention at the World Food Summit in 1996, where the concept of community food security was envisioned. This framework came as a direct critique and alternative to neoliberal policies that were negatively harming the most marginalized, notably small farmers, landless peasants, and women farmers and workers particularly those in the Third World. Food sovereignty is broad-based and adamant and reframes food as a human right. Food as “right” works on several levels. As defined by La Vía Campesina, “food sovereignty is the peoples’, Countries’ or State Unions’ right to define their agricultural and food policy, without any dumping vis-à-vis third countries.” This includes:

- the prioritization of local production over export
- free access to land, water and seed for peasants and landless peoples to be sustainably distributed and communally looked after
- land reform
- the rights of farmers and peasants to produce food and the rights of consumers to decide what they consumer, and know how and by whom it is produced
- populations taking part in agricultural policy decisions
- and the recognition of women farmers’ rights and their roles in agricultural and food production (“La Vía Campesina”; “Food Sovereignty”).

(Re)framing food as a human right implies that individuals can require the state and communities of states to “...respect, protect and fulfill their needs for appropriate access to sufficient food of an acceptable quality” (Windfuhr and Jonsén 19). This has a few implications for those who may not have access or who are legally unable to access such systems to enforce this “human right.” I will discuss this in more detail later.

Food Justice

Food Justice is another framework that many urban, grassroots, community-based organizations employ to describe and implement their work. It's a fairly new framework and has not yet gained much attention within academia or come within the purview of government.

As described by the People's Grocery of Oakland, CA "food justice" draws from the organizing traditions and grassroots mobilizations of the civil rights and environmental justice movements. Food Justice emphasizes "that no one should live without enough food because of economic constraints or social inequalities." Food Justice is a different approach to meeting a community's needs. Self-reliance and social justice are the core elements of food justice that center the community and its leadership to describe their own relevant solutions while providing them with "tools to address the disparities within our food systems and within society at large" ("Brahm's Blog"). Food justice has a greater community emphasis. Rather than an individualized focus, food justice recognizes the systemic processes which create and reinforce inequalities and food access being one of them.

Current State of Food System in Seattle, Washington

In this section, I review the current state of the food system in Seattle, Washington. It is by no means comprehensive or offers precise examples. It is meant to give a broad idea of emergency food resources and food alternatives in Seattle.

I chose to focus on emergency food resources and food alternatives because they represent two sides of the spectrum of our food system. On one end, emergency resources such as food banks and referral programs are meant to exist for those in need but actually many people have become reliant on them as regular sources of food. On the other end, are food alternatives such as farmers markets, p-patches, and "unconventional" means of food access (dumpster diving and gleaning) which aim to transform our industrialized food system and offer alternatives to the way we (in reality this only refers to the ideals of particular people, more later) eat and our relationship with food.

Here, I want to offer a few critiques of the emergency food or antihunger movement because of the somewhat contradictory affects and consequences it creates (there will be a more detailed critique and discussion of food alternatives later in the paper). Since the early 1980s, a significant hunger relief network has developed and expanded over the years to include food banks, food pantries, gleaning operations, federal food stamp assistance, and surplus commodity distribution, in order to respond to the emergency food needs of poor households (Campbell

345). The antihunger movement focuses on alleviating hunger in individuals through the emergency food system (342). This emphasis on the individual can and does create “blindness” in that it fails to recognize the systemic conditions that create hunger. The emergency food or the antihunger movement utilizes the “...medical treatment or social welfare model [and] emphasizes short-term hunger alleviation over longer term issues of household income, nutritional quality, food access, or food sourcing” (Campbell 345). Both the medical treatment and social welfare models place blame on the individual. They fail to understand the ways in which systems and institutionalized marginalization shape people’s, for example, health issues or food access. These models have created stigma not only about hunger but poverty and those who need and/or seek these emergency and federally funded social welfare programs.

Additionally, the emergency food or antihunger movement fully depends upon the conventional food system for “excess” products which then are distributed to “those in need” (Campbell 345). It’s based on the supposed surplus of capitalism which exploits and oppresses not only people in terms of labor but also the environment. There is no doubt that there is enough food to feed everyone in the U.S. “...nearly twice over – even after exports are considered” (345). Distribution and systemic processes must be considered as opposed to blaming and consequently stigmatizing individuals in particular situations and groups of people (“Anti-racist practice” 343).

But, emergency food resources are helpful. There are thousands of people and families who turn to these sources in times of need. But, when people and families rely on emergency food resources as daily and regular sources of food, there seems to be a problem. The emergency food/antihunger movement not only replicates inequalities but reinforces them.

With this base understanding, I created Figure 1 depicting emergency food resources and food alternatives in Seattle, Washington. Emergency food resources located on the map are food banks and referral programs. Food Alternatives include farmers markets, p-patches, and “unconventional” means of food access. It was interesting to compare this figure to that of the *Acting* Food Policy Council’s Issue No. 4 “Mapping Food Insecurity and Access in Seattle and King County.” To provide a brief background, the Council was formed in May 2006 with first meetings about food policy in 2004. The AFPC is comprised of 11 individuals from various sectors representing food system issues. The AFPC is one of 75plus food policy councils nationwide and the most important function of a FPC is to bridge local governments and food

issues to create a more comprehensive and coordinated approach to food policy (“Seattle-King County”).

In the AFPC’s Issue No. 4, the Council created an index of “food insecurity” risk factors which included issues such as lower income, higher unemployment, medical expenses, among other factors. Using 2000 Census data, they created a “food insecurity risk factors index” by weighing each of the variables in the Census according to their connection to food insecurity (4). From here, the Council created an index of the density of food insecure households and mapped the results (3). The logistics of how the Council came to calculate their indexes are not necessary to discuss in this paper.

What is important though, is the map which the Council created. Figure 2 has been borrowed from the AFPC report and remains unchanged. Figure 2 depicts the areas in Seattle at risk for food insecurity. The blue dots denote the locations of major grocery stores. The beige blocks are those block groups with greater than 50 food insecure persons per square kilometer. There are interesting differentiations to be considered between Figures 1 and 2.

Figure 1. Food alternatives and emergency food resources/referral programs in Seattle, Washington

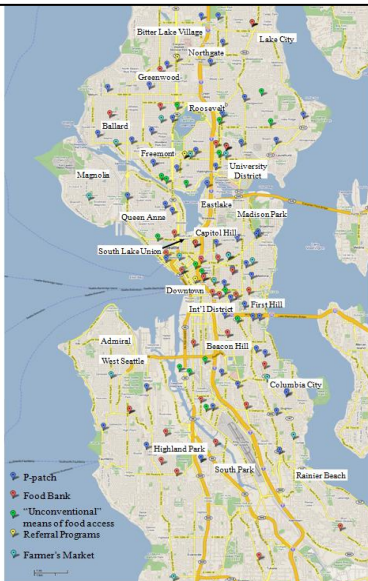
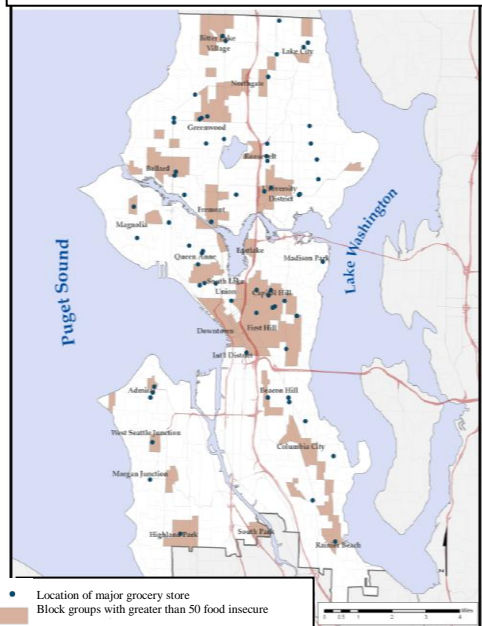


Figure 2. Areas in Seattle at risk for food



Discussion and Analysis

A clarification must be made before comparing the two figures. The beige blocks denote block groups with greater than 50 food insecure persons per square kilometer. Based on the figure, it could be argued that affluent places such as Queen Anne or Magnolia face “food insecurity.” But, the AFPC took into consideration two factors when creating these block groups. One was transportation. The Council took into account distances to access public transportation as well as travel time. For more affluent neighborhoods, personal transportation is most likely even if access to public transportation is sparse. The other the Council took into account was distance to major grocery stores. It is reality that both low-income and affluent neighborhoods may lack grocery stores. Yet, more affluent people have access to transportation that low-income people may not.

There are a few major points of contrast and comparison between the two figures. Based on Figure 1, there seems to be an increase in referral programs and food banks in “food insecure” neighborhoods such as downtown Seattle, Columbia City, Rainier Beach, and South Park. These neighborhoods are characterized by low-incomes and racially/ethnically diverse including diverse in legal status. In these same neighborhoods, also referring to Figure 1, there are fewer food alternatives. In Figure 2, there are a lack of major grocery stores in the aforementioned neighborhoods. Within these areas of Seattle there are smaller “ethnic” stores that may carry produce and other fresh foods but were not accounted for in the AFPC’s study. Also, the fact that major grocery stores are not located with low-income communities brings attention to the practice of redlining.

The notable difference in location of food alternatives versus emergency food resources draws attention to who has access to what. Food alternatives are not being located within low-income communities, for reasons that will be addressed later in the paper. The distribution of these sources of food, too, reveal who has the privilege and access to what particular food source.

Critiques and Considerations: Community/Food Security, Food Sovereignty, Food Justice, and Rights

The food alternatives movement in the U.S. has been dominated by a food security discourse. As I previously demonstrated, emergency food resources too utilize the language of food security. It’s appropriate then to offer several critiques of food security and community food security, beginning with a critical analysis of food sovereignty.

Before beginning, I want to make clear that the intent of critiquing these frameworks, is not, in the end, to “choose” which framework would result in a comprehensive and systemic understanding of oppression and the food systems. Rather the intent is to offer a analysis to understand how these discourses are connected and how the underlying and sometimes problematic assumptions may reveal potential steps forward that could transform our relationship with food and ultimately one another. I will discuss this in greater detail in the following section.

In the period during which food security was introduced, there was a greater focus on First World national food security and “security” was production oriented. Even as discussions changed from the overall availability of food to individual’s access to food, there has still been an overwhelming bias towards global, national, and regional availability of food rather than the individual’s *access* to food (Windfuhr and Jonsén 22). Furthermore, food security implies that there is a desirable *condition* which the government claims to be working for but is not *obligated* for its responsibility for the situation of hunger and the malnutrition of people (Windfuhr and Jonsén 22).

Food security recognizes peoples disproportionate access to food. It also recognizes the purchasing of food, therefore addressing the economic aspects of food consumption. Although these are important acknowledgements, the food security framework does not mention how people necessarily would access this (safe and nutritious) food. Stated as is, it merely states a *goal* as opposed to specific recommendations or programs in order to achieve this *goal* (Windfuhr and Jonsén 23). In “Explorations on Human Rights,” Rajeev Patel notes that the definition of food security is compatible to “...an economy with less than full employment in which people are persuaded that the food they are fed on welfare is culturally appropriate, safe, and nutritious” (90). This serves as an important hypothetical interpretation of what achieving food security could look like and still fulfill the definition. Patel’s comment speaks to the vague language of the definition as well as the vagueness in actions needed to meet this goal. In addition, most definitions of food security fail to articulate an analysis of power or place social justice and human rights at the center of their analysis (“Brahm’s Blog”). By not doing so, the framework fails to identify why people and communities don’t have access to nutritious and culturally appropriate foods in the first place. Lastly, the ways in which food security is defined it fails to address where food comes from and where it is produced (Pramono)

As outlined above, the community food security framework begins to incorporate an analysis of power and social justice. Yet, it only

implies that social and economic factors lead to food insecurity rather than explicitly stating them in the definition. The way in which its defined hopes for social justice as an outcome as opposed to centering social justice as an approach to inequalities in the food system (“Brahm’s Blog”).

Food sovereignty has a similar context as food security in that it was brought forward at international levels. However, food sovereignty is written more from a rural perspective. As result, it more land- and place-based and argues for the recognition, respect and fulfillment of the rights of peasants, fisher people, small land holders, farmers, and particularly women farmers. It represents the desires and autonomy of many Third World peoples and communities and the need for the respect of their rightful sovereignty. It also applies a systemic, both local and global, consideration to their objectives and demands.

This framework applies a rights-based approach and integrates issues/rights already recognized in international law and also those not part of international law, such as the “right to produce” or the “right to food sovereignty.” Rights-based language is used to support their political demands by showing that they must be fulfilled because they are considered basic by the marginalized and negatively affected communities (Windfuhr and Jonsén 23). Also, food sovereignty’s approach to rights is transgressive, insofar that it focuses on the people who are meant to hold them as opposed to the institutions which enforce, delegate and police rights (Patel 92).

I would like to offer a few critiques of food sovereignty. Any critiques of food sovereignty are not meant to disregard or discredit this powerful and necessary stance. This framework is transgressive and demands the fulfillment of people’s rights, without the need for justification. There’s no need to justify if they’ve been “guaranteed.” Nonetheless, one of the core questions of this research is to open the dialogue and potential of the formation of a transgressive and anti-oppressive framework relevant for rural-urban connections. Food sovereignty was collectively and sensitively envisioned as a rural-based approach and emphasis. The question remains: how can this framework be applied and useful within the peri-urban context? Food sovereignty demands that land, water and seed not be governmentally determined but communally cared and looked after without government input. Navigating the complex urban bureaucracy so that neighborhoods are really autonomous in how they care for land, water and seed could prove challenging. City prioritization of land use may affect decisions for communal land and water management for food/aesthetic production. Moreover, city politics of gentrification and displacement are also at

work within neighborhoods. I do not want to make the argument that food sovereignty is too “idealistic.” Idealism is not relevant in the purview of social justice for marginalized and oppressed peoples because fighting and struggling for social justice will always seem to “idealistic” for outsiders. There is potential within food sovereignty and this will be highlighted in a later section.

Food justice has been a concept of self-empowerment and community autonomy. It is predominantly used to describe social justice centered food work within urban neighborhoods and such organizations as Mo’ Better Foods, People’s Grocery, Just Food, Growing Power, and B-Healthy utilize this framework. These organizations, and others, work within and beside low-income, ethnically and racially diverse neighborhoods.

Food justice work is very grassroots and community-based and hasn’t received scholarly attention to the degree that community/food security and food sovereignty have. I borrow People’s Grocery’s description of food justice. For People’s Grocery, Food Justice goes beyond advocacy and direct “service.” It calls for organized community responses to food problems that are locally driven and owned. As was described in an article concerning food justice work and comparing this to food security,

“food security is more about analyzing problems, ameliorating issues and provides answers...food justice...involves local people from seed to sale. It educates, organizes and mobilizes new social relations around food” (“The ‘Food Justice’ Movement”)

I want to underscore the claim that food security is more about “ameliorating issues” as it seems an appropriate interpretation of the definition and work of food security. Furthermore, these organizations recognize that our current food system fails to provide low-income peoples with healthy foods while failing to create jobs and support local food businesses in urban communities. With this recognition, the work of food justice activists is to centralize the needs of the urban poor and develop creative ways “... that produce and distribute fresh foods, provide nutrition education, promote urban agriculture and create local jobs” (“People’s Grocery – About Us”). Although food justice, too, acknowledges the global-local, or glocal, connections of our current food system, there is a minimal discussion of importance of urban-rural relations either economically, socially or politically.

I want to unpack the use and term of “rights” which was often used in community/food security literature. A discussion of “rights” has often accompanied with issues and discussions of “democracy,”

“citizenship,” “food citizens,” “citizenry,” and “citizens” (Campbell; Delind; Levkoe; Wekerle). Inferring to an idea of rights and the fulfillment of these rights and regarding people as “food citizens” is not critical of those it encompasses/defines and those it leaves on the periphery. Citizenship defines those who can participate and those who cannot; those who have access to particular resources and those who it denies based on their status. Those who face, to use a common phrase used in food discourse, “food insecurity” are marginalized communities. Low-income neighborhoods and racially/ethnically diverse who may vary in legal status, often face “food insecurity.” Food security claims that “all people” should have access to nutritious and culturally appropriate food through non-emergency sources. However, “all people” does not include all people, but rather is defined by citizenship status. Those who are deemed “illegal” or “undocumented” are prevented from turning to government funded resources such as the food stamp program. Considering institutional barriers and claims of inclusivity based on particular perimeters, it isn’t surprising then that many immigrants face food insecurity and turn to emergency channels for food.

Both food sovereignty and food justice reframes the access to food as a “human right” (Patel; People’s Grocery). Framing food as a human rights issue expands the “criteria” to include “all people.” Human rights imply that all peoples regardless of citizenship status or location deserve food and the access and availability of food. Going even further, both food sovereignty and food justice demand that people can be more in control of, not only their actual consumption of food, but the production of their food and the resources to do so (using the term production seems to “commodify” or imply a system of added value towards a means of commodification but it seems most fitting).

Lastly, I want to make a comment on the use of “consumer” in the literature regarding community/food security and food sovereignty. Besides the actual act of “consuming,” the use of the word reinstates particular ideas regarding our relationship with food. The use of consumer seems to contradict the claim that food is a human right. If people cannot afford to purchase food, how can food then be considered an “inalienable right” that all should have access to? Using the term “consumer” reinstates the commodification of food and overlooks how access to food is stratified by class.

Space, Privilege, and Whiteness in the Food Alternative Movement

This section is not meant to be separate of the section discussing the implications of the three food discourses. Rather, this is meant to compliment that discussion so that these would be considered

simultaneously and grow from and with one another. In addition, this is a broader discussion that is highly relevant to the previous sections regarding the current state of alternatives and emergency food resources in Seattle, Washington. These are frameworks through which to view and critique the current system. Furthermore, critiques are not meant to deny or overlook the ways in which food alternatives have created amazing programs and attempts at changing our current food system. Imperfections are expected and critiques are meant to rework and reframe as opposed to demolish.

Space, privilege, and whiteness are critical when considering any social movement. Privilege is relative; for example, people of color who have had the opportunity to receive any sort of higher education can be noted as having an educational privilege. The attainment of a higher degree in U.S. society is looked upon as a positive achievement with associated assumed implications of work ethic and/or the achievement of highly valued skills. It may seem that I'm claiming that privilege is attainable. In some cases yes and many no. For example, the social and systemic privileging of particular bodies with particular skin colors is one that is not attainable but is rather a system into which we are born. This system is consequently performed on us as we perform in it. This system of privilege as maintained via discrimination (sexism, racism, homophobia, ableism, and particularly nationality and parameters of citizenship) is highly pervasive and, blatantly or not, permeates our everyday interactions as it perpetuated systemically. The food alternative movement is no exception.

Advocates of food alternatives often focus on access and the education of people about food, where it comes from, and how to eat it. Food alternatives have been noted to cater to well-off consumers, in-part because they have been designed and located in places to ensure market opportunities and decent prices for farmers ("Bringing Good Food" 431). Also, those who tend to be involved in food alternatives are often economically and/or socially middle class ("Whiteness, Space" 522). Guthman's research has noted that for the most part, food alternative institutions are "white" spaces, not only because of the bodies which frequent these spaces, but also the cultural codings performed in these spaces ("Bringing Good Food" 431).

In order to connect space, privilege and whiteness and use this connection to critique the three aforementioned discourses, it is helpful to contextualize these connections in terms of the work of Julie Guthman and Rachel Slocum. I want to first acknowledge, as Slocum does, that a reduction of whiteness to that of racism or privilege must be avoided ("Whiteness, Space" 526). It isn't constructive to reduce whiteness to

such incomplete and simplistic renditions. Rather, an *active* and *continuous* engagement with whiteness and privilege (as well as relative privilege) is necessary to have a better understanding of systemic interconnections and how to creatively form a more encompassing, progressive, strategy of food work that is anti-racist and anti-oppressive.

In Guthman's article "'If They Only Knew: Color Blindness and Universalism in California Alternative Food Institutions,'" she engages whiteness and its unmarked prevalence within food alternative institutions. Drawing from feminist scholars and geographers who focus on conceptualizations of whiteness, Guthman provides a useful framework to think and bridge the concepts of space, privilege and whiteness.

I want to echo Guthman in that "white" is a messy and complex identity as is any other identity in order to borrow her interpretation of whiteness. For Guthman, "whiteness" refers to several points:

...the phenotype of pale bodies, an attribute of particular people, a result of historical and social processes of racialization, a set of structural privileges, a standpoint of normalcy, or particular cultural politics and practices ("If They Only Knew" 390).

Because of their presumed normalcy and universalizing assumptions, whiteness often goes unnamed, unmarked, unquestioned, and unchallenged (390).

Guthman pulls from geographers of whiteness, including Kobayashi and Peake, to connect the ways in which whiteness' unmarked nature works in shaping social relations and therefore spaces ("If They Only Knew" 390). Guthman notes Kobayashi and Peake's statement that, "whiteness is indicated less by its explicit racism than by the fact that it ignores, or even denies, racist implications" (qtd. "If They Only Knew" 390; "Bringing Good Food"). The failure to actively engage or even mention privilege and how it manifests itself in the food alternatives movement, or any movement for that matter, speaks volumes to the underlying and hidden "cultural politics and practices" at play in shaping these food alternative spaces.

Guthman continues and points to two interworking manifestations of whiteness and how they consequentially define food alternative practice and space. The first is color blindness, which has its origins in liberal thought and has ways of erasing racial identifiers, a practice that does more violence than not. It not only erases histories but the very real effects of racism as well as the privilege of whiteness itself ("If They Only Knew" 391; "Bringing Good Food").

The other manifestation is universalism. Universalism isn't immediately raced but dependent upon "whitened cultural practices" ("If

They Only Knew” 391; “Bringing Good Food” 434). Sometimes universalism takes the form of particular aesthetic standards and often has the ability to erase, refuse and fail to recognize the experiences, aesthetics, and ideals of others. For those who do not hold the same “...white ideals, are justifiably marginalized.” For those who these ideals do not resonate, they must be educated to these ideals or continue to be marked as different (“If They Only Knew” 391; “Bringing Good Food”). This need for the improvement of others elides the historical processes which produced these material and cultural distinctions in the first place (“Bringing Good Food” 436).

Color blindness and universalism as manifestations of whiteness are important to work through when considering food alternative practices and spaces. As a person of color walking through these spaces I do feel a sense of uneasiness. Sometimes I feel the ways in which I eat or have been brought up eating aren’t good enough or healthy enough. It seems clearer then that there are particular aesthetic standards and taste standards that are being upheld within these spaces. Furthermore, because these spaces are framed particularly within a food security discourse, the framework and language of food security will also reflect these whitened cultural practices.

Included in my notion of food alternatives are other means of food access. Often these are “unconventional,” meaning not within the purview of what many think of “normal” or “alternative” channels. Such “unconventional” means are dumpster diving and gleaning projects and/or sites. There seems to be a greater awareness of the privilege associated with these means of food access and I want to acknowledge and engage them here.

SeattleDIY is a collective who “...believe in being the creators of culture rather than consumers.” The Collective believes in promoting a just society without hierarchies by fighting institutionalized oppression such as racism, sexism, ageism/adultism, and homophobia. They also “...support environmental justice, animal rights, egalitarianism, and human rights” (“About SeattleDIY”). The Collective produces various do-it-yourself zines and guides. One of them is their dumpster diving zine.

The zine offers an introduction to dumpster diving, etiquette, tips, and most interesting, critiques of dumpster diving. Throughout the zine, the writers are sensitive to the lifestyle choice of dumpster diving. They acknowledge the potential stigmas of dumpster diving and how it “...reinforces the shame associated with being poor” (“Dumpster Dive”). Engaging in an act that’s associated with poverty, the zine claims, would reinforce class divisions. The writers also recognize that this may be

especially difficult for those who face other “social divisions” like race, sexual orientation, and gender identity (“Dumpster Dive”). People who fear for their legal status, they may also be compromising their lives if they have a run-in with the police resulting in possible jail time or worse.

The writers’ care and acknowledgement of privilege is quite important. They recognize that participating in dumpster diving can compromise one’s safety based on their positionality, identification and status within society. There is a great deal of privilege associate with such a “lifestyle choice.” Choice can be a signifier of privilege. For many people, because of low-income, working class, legal status, and/or homelessness (among other plausible dynamics), dumpster diving may not be a “choice” but a daily lived reality. This is embodied in the writers’ statement, “. . .those of us with *privilege* to either ignore the realities of these issues, or to face the reality of these issues, dumpster diving feeds us, supplements us, sustains us” (“Dumpster Dive”). I want to add that, particularly for white people, the act of “choosing” and “living outside the system” is socially more acceptable. There are stigmas and distorted assumptions when marginalized people “choose.” There are barriers which are obvious and real for marginalized people that either don’t exist or bypass those with privilege, particularly white people.

Lastly, the writers’ note that dumpster diving is really not living outside of the system. Rather, food and other goods found when dumpstering are products of the capitalist system. The food and goods are excess produced by capitalism and the exploitation of people and the environment. Dumpster diving, then, is dependent upon the processes of capitalism and oppression (“Dumpster Dive”). There are class and racial undertones to dumpster diving and an inherent privilege in this “choice.”

The dynamics of space, privilege, and whiteness are not particular to the shaping of any one type of space. Skin color and race are constant threads in U.S. society. The ways in which race and racial cultural practices manifest themselves in different spaces are important to the lived and perceived experiences of people. Questioning, challenging, and engaging privilege and whiteness can add so much more meaning and understanding of food alternative spaces and work. It has the potential of broadening the scope, de-centering whiteness and centering the needs of the most marginalized.

Bringing it Together: Towards An Anti-Oppressive and Anti-Racist Movement and Framework

This concluding section is meant to center the aforementioned discussions about space, privilege, whiteness, and the critiques of food

alternative systems and the three food discourses. But, before proceeding I want to offer a few critiques of the concept of “local” for it also has greater implications for framing and language.

Firstly, there exists no consistent definition of “local” (Peters *et al.* 2). Local has often been defined in terms of distance such as a particular number of miles but even these distances have a large range from statewide or region wide. Each of these have been argued as remaining “local.”

Hinrichs and Allen also argue the limitations of “the local.” For these authors, research on local food systems, and I add food alternatives practice and work, are more market than production focused and less centered on social justice concerns (332). The authors also draw from other analysts of sustainable food and local food systems who note that often the interests and experiences of disadvantaged populations (the poor, racial/ethnic minorities, farmworkers) are overlooked or subordinated to the prioritization of economic viability and environmental sustainability (332-333). People’s Grocery echoes this line of thinking and states that market-driven approaches leave out low-income “consumers” who do not have the financial or political power to advocate for inclusion in the food system (“People’s Grocery – About West Oakland”).

Buy local food campaigns, as argued by Hinrichs and Allen, seek not so much to disrupt capitalist relations nor do they envision radical new or transformative economies (339). These campaigns have a blend of protectionist and developmentalist impulses which “...represent a response to the perceived threats of a globalizing, industrialized food system” (342). Localism, additionally, “...can be defensive, xenophobic and impervious to uneven development, as if all communities would want to stay as they are” (“Brining Good Food” 436). Localism and buying local campaigns can produce social justice “blindness” (Hinrichs and Allen 339). Thus, focusing on buying local from local producers can in/directly harm vulnerable food and agricultural workers in distant places, while simultaneously protecting and supporting “local” agriculture (343). A broad reference can be the numerous times in which various food items (including produce) that were imported from “outside” countries have been recalled due to outbreaks or contamination. These instances have often invoked nationalistic, protectionist, xenophobic, and anti-immigration language but masked by “localizing” discourse.

Critiquing “the local” is helpful to make greater connections and envisioning a framework relating and engaging different scales of

analysis, as well as place, social justice, and our food systems. People's Grocery argues,

With 80% of the world's population living in cities and 90% of global consumption derived within cities, urban areas must be included in the reshaping of food systems to become sustainable, equitable and beneficial to small farmers, low-income consumers and the environment alike ("People's Grocery – About West Oakland").

People's Grocery approaches their work through a food justice lens. Although there's an acknowledgement that small farmers and urban areas must be included in reshaping of the food system, their work is primarily focused on expanding urban-based self-sustaining projects. While food justice as well as community/food security recognizes necessary connections between different members, food sovereignty discourse as well as Arturo Escobar's concepts of place can add to this conversation.

Food sovereignty centers small farmers, landless peasants, and, most notably, women farmers. This framework recognizes that gender is at play when considering issues of land, water, and seed access as well as the autonomy of farmers more generally. Yet, this framework centers rural issues and needs and rarely considers urban issues. Before continuing, I want to make clear that there is an urban bias in our society and in many places globally. For many countries, "development" means progress and this leads to a bias towards urban/izing areas because they represent the epitome and center of such thinking. This often comes to the neglect of rural areas and their marginalization. With that noted, food sovereignty is very important because rural people, their livelihoods, and needs are often neglected and, thus, must be considered in food practice and work.

Additionally, food sovereignty is place-based. Place-based is hard to think through in the context of those who do not own land. Arturo Escobar, a critical development scholar, provides an argument that bridges these thoughts and provides a way to connect rural and urban areas. Escobar has argued that there is a clear differentiation between "place" and "the local" (Wekerle 380). Escobar argues that local are scales, processes, or levels of analysis and not places or locations. For Escobar, "...place refers to the experience of, and from, a particular location with some sense of boundaries, grounds, and links to every day practices" (qtd. in Wekerle 380). Here, Escobar rethinks "the local" as well as the meaning and importance of place. For those who are landless who reside in rural or urban areas, can still have a sense of place. Place is not rooted in the physical. It is not necessarily defined by the ownership

of land. Therefore, landless peasants, farmworkers, and those in urban areas who do not own land, can still be thought of as “place-based.” The aspect of “place-based” is both relevant and significant for rural and urban peoples.

Collectivity, community, and autonomy are other aspects which would help to envision a more just food framework. These two concepts are vital to both food sovereignty and food justice. Community food security does recognize a community’s needs for self-reliance but offers little in terms of actual ways to go about reaching self-reliance. Food justice and food sovereignty are about collectivity and communal care of community resources. Community autonomy and empowerment are central to their work and their varying projects aim for these goals.

Beyond place, community, and collective action are the systemic ways in which inequalities are reinforced and justified. Community/food security rarely identifies institutional barriers let alone critiques institutionalized oppression and how marginalization results in varying food access. Addressing the underlying disparities of food access would prove more constructive in moving towards a more just framework. Guthman in “Bringing Good Food to Others...” notes that considerations and attention should be paid to the elimination of redlining, the investment in urban renewal, the expansion of entitlement programs, the attainment of living wages, the elimination of toxins within neighborhoods among other issues (443). The issues which Guthman notes are important to identify. Expanding entitlement programs, on the other hand, may be problematic for a few reasons. Entitlements programs are government programs that provide individuals with some sort of financial benefit which they have the legal right (meaning enforceable in court) if they meet the eligibility. Such examples are Social Security, Medicare, food stamps, and agricultural support programs. Usually they are individualized based on citizenship status or residency but have extended to include organizations such as business corporations, local governments, or even political parties (Johnson). If citizenship or residency are the qualifying criteria for entitlement programs, then people who are “illegal” or “undocumented” still remain marginalized. A possible expansion of entitlement programs may not benefit those not “legal;” those who cannot turn to federally funded agencies for assistance particularly when in need of food.

With this in mind, it may prove constructive to frame food as a human rights issue just as the frameworks of food justice and food sovereignty. All people should be entitled to food regardless of physical location and status. If food is reframed as a human right then all peoples must have this right satisfied. By doing so, immigrant people and those

who are deemed “illegal” will be protected and have a little more movement within the system.

As has been shown throughout the paper is that no one discourse can really stand alone. There are beneficial contributions that can be made from community/food security, food sovereignty, and food justice in creating a more comprehensive food framework that is anti-oppressive and anti-racist. Their framing and resulting work contribute to one another and complement one another. Each one expands the conceptualization of the other and provides language to create bridges. In tandem with the discussion about space, privilege, and whiteness, a more comprehensive discourse can be created.

My hopes in this paper was not only to think more broadly but center social justice and the needs and autonomy of the most marginalized. Critiquing and pulling form the three food discourses revealed the ways in which they speak to one another and how they can bridge issues, concerns, and people of many different experiences. Thinking through the ways in which space, privilege, and whiteness manifest themselves in food alternatives is important to show the extent and effectiveness of these alternatives. Researching the current state of the food system of Seattle, Washington creates a location in which to ground important issues such as exclusion and inclusion, who’s really benefitting from these alternatives. and are these alternatives really transformative as we have hoped. And if we really want a just food system, we must envision language and a framework which will bridge people and communities and different levels while being critical of privilege and not creating definers of participation. If we continue to place limits and definers, then we’re in danger of reproducing oppression and exploitation of not only people but the environment as well.

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