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Notes on the practice of food justice in the U.S.: understanding and confronting trauma and inequity

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Abstract

The lexicon of the U.S. food movement has expanded to include the term 'food justice.' Emerging after approximately two decades of food advocacy, this term frames structural critiques of agri-food systems and calls for radical change. Over those twenty years, practitioners and scholars have argued that the food movement was in danger of creating an 'alternative' food system for the white middle class. Alternative food networks drew on white imaginaries of an idyllic communal past, promoted consumer-oriented, market-driven change, and left yawning silences in the areas of gendered work, migrant labor, and racial inequality. Justice was often beside the point. Now, among practitioners and scholars we see an enthusiastic surge in the use of the term food justice but a vagueness on the particulars. In scholarship and practice, that vagueness manifests in overly general statements about ending oppression, or morphs into outright conflation of the dominant food movement's work with food justice (see *What does it mean to do food justice?* Cadieux and Slocum (2015), in this Issue). In this article, we focus on *one* of the four nodes (trauma/inequity, exchange, land and labor) around which food justice organizing appears to occur: acknowledging and confronting historical, collective trauma and persistent race, gender, and class inequality. We apply what we have learned from our research in U.S. and Canadian agri-food systems to suggest working methods that might guide practitioners as they work toward food justice, and scholars as they seek to study it. In the interests of ensuring accountability to socially just research and action, we suggest that scholars and practitioners need to be more clear on what it means to *practice* food justice. Towards such clarity and accountability, we urge scholars and practitioners to collaboratively document how groups move toward food justice, what thwarts and what enables them.

Key words: food justice, trauma, food movement, alternative food networks, antiracism

Résumé

Le lexique du mouvement américain de l'alimentation a été élargi pour inclure le terme 'justice alimentaire.' Émergent après environ deux décennies de campagnes de changer le système agroalimentaires, ce terme encadre plusieurs critiques structurelles de ce système et signaler à un changement radical. Au cours de ces vingt années, les praticiens et les chercheurs ont fait valoir que le mouvement de nourriture était en danger de créer un système alimentaire 'alternative' seulement pour la classe moyenne blanche. Les réseaux alimentaires alternatifs ont attiré sur les imaginaires blanc d'un passé idyllique et communal, et ont promu des changements axée sur le consommateur. Pour la plupart, ils ne considèrent pas les aspects de main-d'œuvre migrante, l'inégalité raciale et le rôle des sexes dans le système agroalimentaires. Justice était souvent laissé à part. Or, parmi les praticiens et les chercheurs nous voyons un élan enthousiaste dans l'utilisation du terme de justice alimentaire, mais un flou sur les détails. Pour les chercheurs et dans la pratique, ce flou se manifeste dans les déclarations trop générales sur la lutte contre l'oppression ou se transforme en confusion entre le travail de 'mouvement de la nourriture dominante' avec la justice alimentaire (voir *Qu'est-ce que cela signifie de faire la justice alimentaire?*, Cadieux et Slocum (2015) dans ce volume). Dans cet article, nous nous

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concentrons sur l'un des quatre noeuds (traumatisme / inégalité, l'échange, la terre et du travail) autour de laquelle la organisation de la justice alimentaire semble se produire: a reconnaître et faire face à la traumatisme historique collective, un racisme persistante, et l'inégalité de classe et du sexe. Nous appliquons ce que nous avons appris de notre recherche dans les systèmes agroalimentaires du Canada et des États-Unis pour suggérer des méthodes de travail qui pourraient guider les praticiens et les chercheurs dans leur travail vers la justice alimentaire. Dans le souci d'assurer la reddition de comptes à la recherche socialement juste et l'action, nous suggérons que les chercheurs et les praticiens doivent être plus clair sur ce que signifie pratiquer la justice alimentaire. Vers une telle clarté et de responsabilité, nous exhortons les chercheurs et les praticiens de documenter comment les groupes se déplacent de concert vers la justice alimentaire, ce qui contrarie et ce qui les permet.

Mots clés: justice alimentaire, la traumatisme, les mouvements sociales pour la souveraineté alimentaire, les réseaux alimentaires alternatifs, l'antiracisme

Resumen

El léxico del movimiento alimentario de Estados Unidos se ha ampliado para incluir el término "justicia alimentaria." Emergiendo después de aproximadamente dos décadas de promoción alimentaria, este término se refiere a críticas estructurales de los sistemas agroalimentarios y pide un cambio radical. Durante esos veinte años, profesionales y académicos han argumentado que el movimiento alimentario estaba en peligro de crear un sistema alimentario "alternativo" para la clase media blanca. Las redes alimentarias alternativas se basaban en los imaginarios blancos de un pasado idílico comunal, y promovían un cambio impulsado por el mercado y orientado al consumidor, y mantenían un conspicuo silencio en áreas tales como diferencias de género en el trabajo, mano de obra migrante y desigualdad racial. La justicia en sí a menudo ni siquiera se discutía. Ahora bien, entre profesionales y académicos vemos al mismo tiempo tanto un uso cada vez más común del término justicia alimentaria, como una imprecisión en los detalles. En la teoría y la práctica, esa vaguedad se manifiesta en las afirmaciones demasiado genéricas sobre el fin de la opresión, o bien se transforma en una fusión pura y simple del trabajo del movimiento alimentario dominante con la justicia alimentaria (ver *What does it mean to do food justice?* de Cadieux y Slocum (2015) en este volumen). En este artículo, nos centramos en uno de los cuatro nodos (trauma/desigualdad, cambio, tierra y mano de obra) en torno al cual la organización de la justicia alimentaria parece ocurrir: reconocer y confrontar trauma histórico colectivo y la persistencia de las desigualdades por motivos de raza, género y clase. Aplicamos lo que hemos aprendido de nuestra investigación en los sistemas agroalimentarios de los Estados Unidos y Canadá para sugerir métodos de trabajo que podrían orientar a los profesionales en su labor hacia la justicia alimentaria y a los académicos en su intento de estudiarlo. En aras de garantizar la responsabilidad de una investigación y una acción socialmente justas, sugerimos que los académicos y los profesionales deben tener más claro lo que significa practicar la justicia alimentaria. A fin de alcanzar esa claridad y responsabilidad, instamos a los académicos y profesionales a documentar colaborativamente cómo distintos grupos se mueven hacia la justicia alimentaria, así como los obstáculos que encuentran y los factores que posibilitan su acción.

Palabras clave: justicia alimentaria, trauma, soberanía alimentaria, redes alternativas de alimentos, antirracismo

1. Introduction

In the first decade of the 21st century, the term 'food justice' blossomed throughout the North American food movement's lexicon, joining the similarly radical concept for food system analysis, 'food sovereignty' (see Martínez-Torres and Rosset 2010; Wekerle 2004). In contrast to the analyses and strategies of the 'food movement', these two concepts offer a stronger critique of capitalism, neoliberalism, systemic racism, and patriarchy.² Knowing that it was a commitment to justice that many critics had found wanting in sustainable agriculture and community food security endeavors, we wondered what had changed in practice with the adoption of these concepts? In other words, could we see something different in *what* food movement

² Throughout this article we use 'food movement' (also known as the 'dominant food movement', Alkon and Agyeman 2011) and 'alternative food networks' (AFNs) interchangeably. The latter has been the convention in agri-food studies (Beus and Dunlap 1990; Kremen, Iles, and Bacon 2012). These terms refer to a constellation of individuals, NGOs, alliances, companies, and government entities arranged in affiliations of different intensities and scales to support food security and sustainable farming (Levkoe 2006).

organizations do or in *how* they work that would indicate a shift toward the pursuit of transformative social change?

In reviewing scholarship on food justice, we find descriptions of inspiring examples like workers' co-ops (Alkon 2013), and organizing taking place in all corners of the world in pursuit of socially just food systems (Allen 2008), as well as mobilizing by people of color (Anguelovski 2014; White 2010, 2011).³ Yet in this nascent literature, we find few studies of what AFNs are doing differently, and we do not see many accountable appraisals of the approaches, methods, and strategies that enable dominant food movement groups to shift toward socially just food systems.

As we argued in the previous article in this volume (Cadieux and Slocum 2015), practicing food justice means intervening in the areas of trauma/inequity, exchange, land, and labor arrangements using processes that enable people to deal with power relations across relevant scales with the aim of effecting systemic change. With this article, we aim to provide a clearer understanding of what enables, extends, and thwarts food justice practice. We call for a more rigorous body of scholarship on the subject, as well as greater accountability in food activism. We offer suggestions for practicing food justice.

We appear to be in a critical moment of reflection and action in food change activism. Though the pursuit of social justice in food system change has been acknowledged to be extremely difficult (see Patricia Allen's work), we find the concepts of food justice and food sovereignty coming into much wider use in our research sites. The Great Recession,⁴ the multiple shocks of globalization, and the restructuring of agri-food systems have led people toward new economic practices and advocacy networks centered on social justice and social welfare. And in the academic community, we have witnessed intense interest from students at all levels as well as from established scholars who have taken up the subject of food change with zeal, resulting in a multitude of new graduate degree programs and research projects. Yet many of these have developed in institutional contexts unresponsive of the need to address the difficult nature of food justice work as a result of disciplinary distance from social analysis and a lack of institutional commitment. All told, it seems a good time for scholars and practitioners to ask what food justice looks like in practice (see Allen 2008).⁵

We make our contribution to agri-food studies in *this* journal because it was the trans-disciplinary literature of political ecology that provided the platform for research that made visible the relationship between agriculture and relations of power. Rising out of the study of agricultural systems in the global south (Blaikie and Brookfield 1987), political ecology went on to reveal how people positioned within gender, caste, race, and class relationships created, organized, sustained, and protected these agri-food systems in the context of slavery and colonial terror, state agendas, NGO expectations, and Bretton Woods institution policy (Carney 1993, 2001; Carney and Rosomoff 2010; Escobar 1995; Moore 2005; Robbins 2004; Schroeder 1999; Watts 1983). It was the *politics* of human-environment relationships that had to be understood. By connecting politics and ecology, the approach invited engagement across scholarly, natural resource management, and activist domains (for instance Robbins 2007; see also for discussion Walker 2007; for current trends see Hiner and McKinnon 2014). A political ecology framework suggests, as we do, that the issue is not *more* food production but *how* societies create food systems. This means knowing not only that worm bins make good soil for urban gardens (the ecology) but also understanding the politics of kale and class, gender and canning, and race and the city. Now that food (e.g. food security, cultural politics of food, biopolitics of food, food movements)—not just agriculture—and the agri-food systems of the global North, not only the global South—are understood as within the domain of political ecology (Agyeman and McEntee 2014), we affirm this trajectory by offering insights into the social practices thwarting and enabling progressive agri-food system transformation. And we join others who call for theorizing race, racism, and the

³ We use terms like 'white' and 'people of color' to designate racialized groups, not demographic categories. The fact of racism and the need for antiracist mobilizing require an acknowledgment that racialized groups exist as a result of phenotype and norms that combine to alter life chances over generations, among other effects. We acknowledge that these terms are convenient and limited; 'white' does not account for the variations in privilege or practice and there is never the homogeneity that the term 'people of color' implies.

⁴ Beginning in 2008 with the global financial crisis.

⁵ Throughout the article we differentiate between practitioners and scholars because this is a common, real-life division enforced substantially by the exigencies of work in the institutions to which each group belongs. That said, we recognize that there are scholars who are activists (which we are or have been) and practitioners who do scholarship too.

body in political ecology (Guthman 2014; Milligan and van Sant 2014; Slocum 2011) as well as for studying environmental justice the world over (Schroeder *et al.* 2008; Sundberg 2008).

In section 2, we suggest that the concept of food justice is now circulating more widely in part due to earlier efforts by antiracism advocates within alternative food networks. This launches us into an argument about why trauma is usefully paired with inequity as a conceptual platform from which to join different streams in the food movement, as well as to practice food justice. Part of the process of doing food justice is to determine the points where efforts toward the ideal get stuck, and what conditions enable them to keep going. Barriers to food movement work that keeps trauma and inequity in active consideration is the subject of section 3. We use cases from our fieldwork here before moving to the conditions that enable an accounting of trauma and inequity in section 4.

2. Historical and conceptual background for a focus on trauma and inequity

This section outlines how antiracist activism in the food movement has provided the ground for recent discussions of food justice and suggests that recognition of these efforts is important to scholarship and practice. We also introduce the concept of trauma, and we propose that an acknowledgement of the experience of collective trauma from past and present injustice should be linked to the principle of equity. We make an argument for the utility of this concept, albeit with caution.

A very brief history of the relationship between food justice and antiracist organizing in one part of the food movement

Food justice now enjoys greater currency in the U.S. food movement in part because of arguments made by antiracism advocates (practitioners and scholars) concerning how the food system and food movement strategies have often served to perpetuate racial inequality. Despite this, some scholarly and practitioner usage of the term appears to suggest that food justice sprang fully formed, with no past, into today's food movement. It did not; there was a long and arduous process toward what was then called antiracist activism and now is identified as a key part of food justice (Holt-Giménez and Wang 2011). Our purpose in stating this is not to authorize an origin story. It is also not a suggestion that race will be central to every food movement context, nor can food justice mobilizing be limited to addressing systemic racism alone. Moreover, we should not limit where we look for authentic food justice; food justice activism is not only the purview of people of color. That said, without acknowledging the history of antiracist activism in the food movement and its relationship to today's food justice mobilizing, scholars might be inclined to forget that the food movement cannot be studied without asking "what does race do here?" (Slocum and Saldanha 2013).

As we review articles and mentor students, we continue to learn of food and society research done without accountability to the history identified above or to research participants involved in food activism. If the issue were merely sloppy literature reviews and muddled analyses that would be one thing, but scholarship continues to be done *on* or *to* people, giving all academics the bad name only some deserve.⁶ In light of our argument in the opening paragraph, accountability means acknowledging the history of antiracist activism in the movement and its relationship to what is now called food justice. This acknowledgment could serve as a

⁶ We refer to a lack of rigor and accountability that affects the quality of scholarship as well as the relationships scholars develop with people in research contexts. The history of academic research on groups of people precedes those of us who seek to work with a 'community.' Most university scholars are aware, whether from Institutional Review Board/Human Ethics mandated training, literature reviews, academic conversations, or experiences in the field, that a justifiable distrust of researchers exists, particularly in some communities. Yet that awareness does not always translate into ways of conducting research. Consequently, not only are people exploited in the research process, but those scholars who are trying to build better relationships with distrustful groups are set back. In our example, the history of anti-racist praxis in the food movement needs to be acknowledged as having happened in order for scholars to engage in ethical research in this context. Both this specific food movement history and the longer history of academic research with people suggest a need not only to know the history but also to *operationalize* a different relationship of power in the research process. Operationalizing is a long-term process that cannot be accomplished by a training workshop. As scholars, we may realize that working toward justice is important, but that realization is only the first step in a process of practicing justice in our work. Having said all this, we refute the idea that research relationships break down clearly along the lines of exploitative, powerful researcher vs. marginalized, powerless communities. Gender, academic employment status, race, sexuality, and class complicate these relationships (for example see Slocum 2009; for discussion see Lake and Zitcer 2012).

guide to creating different scholar-community relationships, formulating better questions and arriving at analyses that show what constitutes food justice, what process leads toward it, what barriers stand in its way, and what enabling conditions are helpful. In other words, we argue that scholarship mindful of the contexts from which food justice has emerged is better scholarship—that is, more likely to be able to adequately and reflexively analyze agri-food systems.

Built over the last fifteen to twenty years, the food movement aimed to create a better food system for the food insecure and for farmers. But the routes chosen—localization and behavioral change primarily—tended not to address how both the food system and the proposed alternatives rest on racist, patriarchal, and capitalist relations. Instead, the food itself—fresh, fruity, local, vegetal—took center stage. Although not disputing the fresh and local focus, voices within the food movement argued that racial justice had been left by the wayside; there was more to be done than localize the food system and change eating habits. For instance, antiracist advocates argued for linking diverse equity concerns through food programming.⁷ As Daniel Ross, the director of *Nuestras Raices*, an organization working primarily with Latinos in Holyoke, Massachusetts pointed out:

...food security cannot be divorced from the issues of concern to communities [...] food and agriculture lends itself to addressing [racism and power imbalances] because food is so central to communities and, if you had working communities, you'd have justice and equality. [...] At the heart is the element of justice (as cited in Slocum 2006).

But as far as food security goes, "you can't do just [food security]. People are concerned about their communities, schools, about globalization and saving their farms" (ibid.). In addition to an analysis of institutionalized inequity in the food system, antiracism advocates argued that the food movement should connect analyses of race across multiple socio-economic areas of peoples' lives, change nonprofit organizational processes, transform how groups work with communities, allocate resources equitably, and rectify historical injustices, all of which we suggest should figure prominently in work that calls itself food justice. At the time most organization leaders knew that systemic racism was a part of the food system but had difficulty seeing how their work might be furthering white privilege.⁸

Although the association had been made between environmental justice and food by key food movement organizers (Gottlieb and Fisher 1996), it was not until the 2003 Boston Community Food Security Coalition (CFSC) conference that an organized and collective antiracist agenda within this particular part of the food movement gathered strength. The Outreach and Diversity Committee of the CFSC decided to focus on institutionalized racism. The vehicles to bring this issue to the Coalition were antiracism training for the board and staff of the CFSC, policy statements, and a 'race, food, justice' track at the 2005 CFSC conference in Atlanta (for analysis and critique see Slocum 2006, 2007, 2009). In the interactions that took place during this time, not only was the fact of institutionalized racism emphasized, but so too was its emotional weight, something experienced by those who live directly under its shadow as well as by those seeking to understand their privilege. In 2007, seeing a new collective as more fruitful than pursuing change within CFSC, antiracist advocates formed the national group, the Growing Food and Justice for All Initiative (GFJI) (Morales 2011). Under the umbrella of Will Allen, director of the Milwaukee Wisconsin-based Growing Power, the connection between food and justice became more explicit, with dismantling racism as a central aim. The tone of conversations also became more inclusive of scholar and practitioner voices.⁹ One immediate local consequence of GFJI in the upper Midwest was the formation of the [Minnesota Food and Justice Alliance](#) to which we refer later in the article.

⁷ This section refers to the Community Food Security Coalition.

⁸ Conclusion drawn from interviews conducted in 2004 by R. Slocum with 80 directors of food movement organizations in the North East and Mid Atlantic.

⁹ Tensions between scholars and activists in the food movement persist, derived in part from the sense among some activists that academics are only extractors of knowledge who are inadequately accountable to putting their work to use for those they study—a tension this article seeks to address. For an example of the persistence of tensions despite efforts to address them see thread [Participatory action research in food justice and food systems, IATP food justice conference follow up](#).

What does understanding 'trauma' do for food justice?

Food justice and food sovereignty are first and foremost critiques of inequities in food systems and demands for structural change. Thus we find that organizing for socially just food systems coalesces around the need to address inequity and trauma. As we suggested above, antiracist mobilizing within and apart from the food movement has brought trauma and inequity to the fore, so that they may be explicitly addressed. The food justice literature and some NGO discourse (e.g. Detroit Food Justice nd) make explicit links to analyses of inequity, particularly to environmental injustice (McClintock 2012) and racial inequality.¹⁰ While equity may easily be seen as a necessary part of food justice, 'trauma' needs explanation. The term is used in food justice organizing to conceptualize the present day experience of significant historical and contemporary harm done especially to indigenous people and people of color in the U.S. and Canada through foundational racism (Fast and Collin-Vézina 2010; Jackson 2011). In that context, it is part of activists' demands that efforts to change the food system acknowledge its historical basis in forced labor and stolen land (Blackmon 2008; Redmond 2012). The theoretical ground of this concept is the idea that the past exists in the present not only in artifacts and institutions (Tully 1995), but in our health, emotional wellbeing, and relationship to others (Gatens 1996, 2002). The fundamental tenet is that embodied experience is historical, and open to change (ibid. 2002,104), an idea that counters fixed subjectivities (identity politics) and provides space for healing on the part of people experiencing trauma as well as shame (Middleton 2010; Probyn 2005). Affects and emotions enter the body, changing how we understand ourselves relative to the past such that "emotions do not represent history, they get into it" (Nussbaum 2001; LaCapra 2001 cited in Probyn 2005, 155).

The concept of collective or cultural trauma has a history in several disciplines apart from medicine, social work, and psychology with which the word is most commonly associated.¹¹ Its non-medical usage is contested with objections arising from its capacity to level difference by collapsing different instances of systemic racism or other violence into one trauma and its static sense of culture. Some see trauma as reducing social relations to either perpetrator or victim of trauma. Also suspect is the potential for trauma to mobilize a focus on suffering as well as create authentic and inauthentic sufferers. It may serve to objectify the traumatized and create a sense that empathy is easy (Ahmed 2004; Berlant 2001; Kansteiner 2004; Pratt 2009; Probyn 2005; Yildiz and Verkuyten 2011; Young 2003 and for the psychological effects of colonialism see e.g. Fanon 1952 and Stoler 2001). As a consequence, we approach the term with caution, acknowledging the above concerns. But we also draw on feminist scholarship of emotion, affect, and embodiment to suggest how trauma is useful in the study and practice of food justice. We propose that attention to and action toward equity needs to be paired with a recognition of the experience of trauma. Equally helpful would be research to understand how coalitions address trauma and what has proved successful.

The word 'trauma' brings a certain urgency to politics (Ahmed 2004). Organizing attention with the concept of trauma shows that for some, the practice of food justice is for *survival*, an embodied, political struggle (see Heynen 2009, 2006). Living in "survival mode" (Wilsey 2013), it is hard for indigenous peoples to "remember who they are and what they need," in other words, to develop the sense of identity and the capacity to build food sovereignty for themselves.¹² When reservation residents are hitting deer with their cars to make sure households eat in the winter, it is inadequate to describe the situation in sterile terms like 'coping' or 'adapting'—terms that remove human ingenuity and capacity as well as the relations of power that create

¹⁰ Gender inequality, though listed with class and race in the familiar triumvirate, is left under-addressed in our article, in activist discussions, and in most scholarship we have read on the subject. Definitions and diagrams mention racism but not patriarchy. There are 'people of color' and 'low-income people' but rarely women. Bringing gender justice into food justice remains to be done in systematic ways. We note that the Democracy = Food + Justice conference did address gender by centering the knowledge and experience of indigenous women and women of color explicitly in plenary sessions (e.g. on race and breastfeeding) although gender (e.g. gendered labor) was not always acknowledged in break-out sessions.

¹¹ This range includes the cultural specificity of trauma (Honwana 1999; Mohanram 2011), healing (Croisy 2006) denial (Nytagodien and Neal 2004), witnessing trauma and affect (Clough 2009), Frantz Fanon's contribution to understanding trauma (Christian 2005), understanding trauma for service provision (Herring *et al.* 2013; Struthers and Lowe 2003), trauma discussed in novels and art (Barnim 2010; Ganser 2004; Lionis 2014; Miller 2008), trauma from the experience of energy extraction, deindustrialization and oil spills (Perry 2012; Ritchie 2012; Walkerdine 2010), and in relation to resilience (Brokenleg 2012; Norris, Tracy, and Galea 2009).

¹² Quote from a workshop on food justice led by the authors and the Agri-Food Collaborative supported by the Institute for Advanced Study at the University of Minnesota (see also the [Issue Brief](#) from this workshop).

the need to 'cope.'¹³ A focus on trauma brings the urgency of past and ongoing harm into the food movement's work. It suggests that food justice cannot settle for promoting mere resilience in the face of a long, slow war against marginalized people, a war that some within the food movement do not recognize (Segrest 2001; NAFSA 2013).¹⁴

Paired with inequity, trauma combines the power of an analysis of inequality with the lived experience of how racialized (dis)advantage settles in bodies (Gravlee 2009; Guthman 2011; Kurtz 2013; Pulido 1994; Schroeder *et al.* 2008). Because trauma is a somatic experience (van der Kolk, McFarlane, and Weisaeth 1996; Wilson 2004), it enables a discussion of the material, *embodied* effects of disparity in ways that go beyond the recounting of excess illness and death data. Acknowledging and being empathetic to trauma suggests an approach that would abjure the targeting of nonwhite, poor, and female fat bodies for improvement through behavioral change. In other words, the practice of food justice would not reduce the injustice of health disparities to personal responsibility (Azzarito 2008; Evans and Colls 2009; Fee 2006; Guthman 2013a, 2013b; Guthman and Dupuis 2006; Herrick 2007; Slocum *et al.* 2011; Wright and Harwood 2008;). It would mean analyzing and addressing the health effects of racism, gender inequality, and class (Gravlee 2009; Krieger 2004; Kurtz 2013) rather than pushing fruit.¹⁵

Trauma is a proxy not only for the experience of the violent past and present of U.S. racism but also for the process of healing (Ahmed 2004; Redmond 2012), an idea that has been powerfully addressed in the work of food justice community organizers.¹⁶ These organizers suggest an 'embodied activism' as a means to heal historical trauma. For example, one of the ways to practice embodied activism is to gift one's labor during collective workdays (weeding, harvesting, etc. at area food organizations), a method applied by the Minnesota Food Association's immigrant farming program and at Dream of Wild Health, a Minnesota organization supporting indigenous food culture through youth farming programs. Moving one's body whether to help people or to help oneself has been shown to be a means to lessen the effects of trauma (see Carolan 2011; Clark 2006, 2007; Hayes-Conroy and Martin 2010; Salatin 2013).¹⁷

We might also suggest, as Sara Ahmed does, that part of healing trauma is the willingness to be moved emotionally through, for instance, witnessing stories of historical injustice. Being moved is "a form of labor or work, which opens up different kinds of attachments to others, in part through the recognition of this work *as* work" (Ahmed 2004: 201, see also Probyn 2005: 123). For Ahmed, justice involves feelings, though not as a ground for action; justice is "irreducible to injury though it does involve injuries" (2004: 202). Healing is a process of exposing wounds rather than covering them, which may inspire critiques of oppressive systems for those in the process of healing (Ahmed 2004: 200). As a joint process involving people who seek healing and witnesses (or allies), trauma may become legible to those who previously did not appreciate its harm or reproduction.¹⁸ It may help people to question mainstream and often neoliberal perspectives that see healing

¹³ The hardship experienced by indigenous people living in settler societies, and that hardship as it relates to agri-food systems, has been well documented (Acton and Engelgau 2002; Anderson 2007; Fee 2006; Povinelli 2009, 2006; Rowse 1998; Wadiwel and Tedmans 2013). But there is a very broad range of experience of trauma and its effects across the indigenous world (Fast and Collin-Vézina 2010). The capacity of indigenous groups to conceptualize and create food justice/sovereignty is the subject of another growing literature. See for instance: (Aguila-Way 2014; Panelli and Tupa 2009; Rudolph and McLachlan 2013).

¹⁴ See also Segrest's [blog](#) and [TED talk](#).

¹⁵ Government institutions and nutritionists recommend daily consumption of five fruits and vegetables. The U.S. food movement has promoted delivery mechanisms like fruit in corner stores, vegetable vans and farmers' markets as a remedy to inadequate levels of consumption in impoverished places.

¹⁶ Exemplars of healing work include Sam Grant and Zea Leguizamon (Movement Center for Deep Democracy), Sam Simmons, Eric Holt-Giménez (Food First), and LaDonna Redmond. Their talks following up from the Food + Justice = Democracy conference are at [Moving ahead on food justice](#). Sam Grant and Sam Simmons offer powerful methods to deal with the experience and reproduction of trauma and anger. Their analyses have been widely recognized by practitioners as crucial for food work.

¹⁷ In addition to these references specific to food, there are many more in the field of emotional and affective geographies (Bondi, Davidson, and Smith 2005; Probyn 2005; Thien 2005a, 2005b; Tolia-Kelly 2006).

¹⁸ In 2014–2015, sustained social action demanding recognition that Black Lives Matter in the face of state violence against people of color and the poor has supported considerable debate about racism and its associated traumas, assumptions about welfare, colonial legacies, and white privilege. These discussions are exposing many people—those already sensitized to issues of racial inequity and those for whom this realm of social action is relatively new—to the principles of antiracism and justice that underlie this article. Although these mobilizations have not yet had an appreciable

as something bestowed by the trauma-free through charity or education. We have observed how attention to healing trauma brings together the content and process of food justice work as colleagues come to recognize and better accommodate each other's histories. But the experience of trauma and its discussion make movement work more complicated; strategies are necessary to overcome the desire to use that difficulty as a justification for further marginalization on the path to getting things done 'efficiently' (see, for example, Zimmerman *et al.* 2010).

Conceptually, trauma might seem limited to those groups, particularly African Americans in the U.S. and colonized people around the world, who have been traumatized by their different collective experiences of violence. It might seem most appropriate, further, to those who live with food-specific traumas like obesity, anorexia, bulimia, diabetes, and alcoholism (Probyn 2008). If so limited, the concept may lead towards the stasis of identity politics or the neoliberal division of groups into individuals who have afflictions and those who do not. But trauma could conceivably stand for more—the effects, for instance, of the devastation of hunger, unemployment, imprisonment, sickness, chronic stress, dangerous work, and infant death. If trauma as debility is seen as a state belonging to all of us in some context, this means a refiguring of the idea of being capable (or of the body in control of itself), potentially avoiding both identity politics and biopolitics (see Puar 2010). Thinking through the concept of trauma could be part of a politics that places the multiple traumatic injustices along the food chain in the forefront instead of the consumer's right not to be injured by food. Rather than reducing the potency of trauma as an analytical concept, our extension of the term serves to spread the empathy around to people who might not qualify for identity-based trauma. In so doing, the concept of trauma may "help us find solidarity where we may have thought there was none before" (Redmond 2012). In sum, where a focus on healing trauma appears to be contributing to conditions under which people are successfully practicing food justice, the concept is being deployed toward a food justice politics based on affinity, not identity.

3. Addressing inequity and trauma: barriers

With the popularity of food justice, alternative food networks are taking steps to become more reflexive about their work. This means recognizing that in the constellation of issues they want to address, often the programs and policies pursued do not result in the transformational change they seek. Reflecting on these steps allows scholars and practitioners to pinpoint places where transformational processes stick and where they flow more easily—in other words, where gaps develop between ideal and action, strategy and capacity, or where people struggle in translating between reflection and action. For the theme of trauma and inequity, a key sticking point is a hesitancy to acknowledge, analyze, and address structural violence, a feature we have noted across our research sites.

Minnesota (MN) is the site of considerable work on sustainable food systems,¹⁹ vast acreages devoted to commodity agriculture (MDA, USDA, and NASS 2012), and stark racial inequalities.²⁰ The primary (and most often funded) Minnesota sustainable agriculture, food security, and anti-hunger organizations are illustrations of the critique that the food movement tends to be more white, affluent, and educated than average Minnesotans, while farm and food chain workers are more likely to be people of color, undocumented, and/or newer immigrants. These groups are marginalized in rural communities still heavily invested in Scando-European identities that have had considerable difficulty publicly addressing demographic shifts brought by immigration and persistent equity issues remaining from colonization (Fennelly 2008; LaDuke 2004). In response to a significant outflow of value from the region due to commodity agriculture (Meter and Rosales 2001), Minnesota AFNs have focused on building infrastructure that enhances economic opportunities in local food provisioning, including considerable investment in farm-to-institution programs, community food security inventories, scalable processing infrastructure, and, increasingly, food policy

effect on the food movement *per se*, we anticipate enhanced attention to food justice in AFNs and scholar-activist relationships as one consequence.

¹⁹ See, for example, the [Sustainable Agriculture and Food Systems projects of the SE MN Regional Development Partnerships](#) or an [overview](#) of food improvement efforts in the region.

²⁰ Rates of unemployment (4.3% white, 12.9% African American), and poverty (7% of white people, 20% of Latinos) vary greatly between white and nonwhite Minnesotans (Austin 2012; Toney 2008).

councils (Peterson 2008). In the following sections we present examples from this state where we have each worked in separate participatory action research.

An alliance for food justice

The Minnesota Food and Justice Alliance (MFJA) was formed in 2008 to address racial injustice in the local food system, recognizing this form of inequity as a central challenge to their work. The organizational representatives who began the group also expressed interest in working together instead of competing over funding, as well as trying to curtail the practice of taking over other peoples' projects (Guettler 2010).²¹ The fact that they resolved to do this was novel, exciting, and immensely important. The organizers used the visit of Will Allen, executive director of Growing Power, to call a meeting titled 'We Will Gather' (pun intended). There, we discussed these issues mainly as separate groups identified as white and of color (as is the tradition in antiracism training). Echoing a sentiment articulated in the Southeast Minnesota case discussed below, people in the white group expressed their sense of being overwhelmed by the problem of systemic racism. Quite a few thought the best means was for each to face her privilege and pursue a private struggle to understand it. Such a focus on inward examination may pose a challenge to the *collective* action necessary to confront institutionalized racism. Despite this dangerous possibility, it was a productive encounter that led to an agreement to meet again. At the first planning meeting after the initial gathering, discussion about what to do veered enthusiastically toward setting up worm bins and hoop houses²² bypassing the question of what would bring about racial justice in the Twin Cities' food system. Here, as with the SE MN case below, what feels actionable often comes in the form of gardens and farmers' markets. These may often amount to solutions in search of a problem, particularly when the question of the challenging coupling of race, gender, and class inequality is left unspoken, unexplored, and unaddressed. If someone's interest is gardens, the problem becomes the need for good soil and the solution, vermicomposting. At the very least, practitioners would want to ask, what does an anti-racist worm bin look like? They would want to consider soil's social dynamics and ask questions about land ownership and garden labor. But more importantly, it would be useful to do some research to determine whether a worm bin was a good solution to the problem of systemic racism in the food system. The conversation below represents different people (15 in attendance) and flowed as follows in this order (partial quotes).

- How do we get to know each other better? Tendency is to set up a project, with a timeline, deliverables, etc.
- The process we followed on at the first meeting was important, and should be used to guide us as we take on a project.
- Amazed by the number of different organizations at that first meeting, and realized how challenging it is to work with such a diverse crowd.
- Diversity of the group is its strength, but also what makes it fragile. Takes time to build common ground.
- Lots of energy at the first meeting, but how do we engage people who aren't the usual suspects, and aren't part of the conversation tonight?
- A vermiculture project would be an excellent way to bring people together, and build trust (Slocum, field notes 17 April 2008).

There are many indicators in the text above that the group understood the time needed for attention to process. Though the idea of a project was to build trust, it was also instrumental in a well-meaning way—a way to engage the unusual suspects, who, in the end, did not show up. A discussion ensued about an "uncomplicated, accessible, and tangible" project, shifting between a greenhouse and a vermiculture operation. One person said "Race is a big issue in relation to food security and social justice, and we need to pay attention to that

²¹ Larger organizations are often better situated to get more of the available funds. Nonprofits of all sizes have been known to go into neighborhoods and essentially capture good work being done in order to serve their programmatic goals and funding needs.

²² Hoop houses are tunnels constructed of plastic used to extend the growing season (DIY greenhouses).

fact. The project is really a means to build community." After that point was made, the group, in a laudable effort, again returned to critical process questions.

- It's important to acknowledge and recognize the role that the community plays in moving this issue forward; the community ultimately must take ownership. We have lots of great energy and ideas, but how do we engage the community?
- The real questions are: How are we going to change the system so that disenfranchised persons have access to land and food? How do we reframe the conversation/process in order to engage those persons?
- We can begin by utilizing the assets that we already have in the community, by asking those persons to help us reframe the issue.
- What is shared power? What is shared responsibility? Where is the balance?
- Seems like we're committed to social justice and dismantling racism. How do we make the connection between that higher goal and an actual project?
- We're in uncharted territory. It's OK to not know where we're going, or how we're going to get there, and to not have the answers.

(Slocum, field notes 17 April 2008).

The fact that the group came together in the first place and asked these questions is remarkable. But in later meetings, the question of racial justice fell off the table and was even explicitly struck from the meeting by a gardening advocate. In answer to a question raised about the *raison d'être* of the group she exclaimed "Rachel, we're not here to talk about justice!" A meeting in October 2008 to come up with a name for the alliance featured the following conversation, illustrating a divergence in the understanding of what was important—urban agriculture or dismantling racism?

- **A:** I like 'We Will Gather' but perhaps a single word name would be easier—but not sure how to shorten it.
- **B (vermicomposting advocate):** The name should be an indication of what the group is about; for my own clarity I've been calling the group 'Twin Cities Urban Ag Coalition.'
- **C (who raised dismantling racism above):** Hmmm...gotta think about that.

Although the people involved posed good questions, they got stuck on the discussion of race and racism. Rather than allying themselves with groups already organized by and/or with people marginalized in the dominant culture and providing support through that channel, they remained a food (or urban agriculture) organization. Group members continued to be the usual suspects of the food movement. Through a process run by a facilitator (from Cooperative Extension, requested by the group), the group eventually decided to call itself the Minnesota Food and Justice Alliance and established an antiracist vision statement. But two years later, the group disbanded because it never was able to collect the people whose trust was desired (on this subject see Sherriff 2009). Since the rise and fall of the MFJA, there have been many more conversations about food justice in area meetings, discussion fora, through sites like healthyeatingmn.org²³ (run by the health insurance company Blue Cross/Blue Shield), and at events like the Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy's (IATP) Food + Justice = Democracy conference. MFJA provided a basis for these later efforts in terms of the overlap of those involved and the development of critical group processes.

MFJA's attempt to bring together practical action and provide a forum for building trust, on one hand, with explicit attention to addressing racism in the food system, on the other, modeled a tension that would continue to be present in almost all of the food work we saw in the ensuing years. Attention to questions of power, privilege, and, to some degree, trauma has increased in even casual food and agriculture activism and

²³ In an illustration of precisely those dynamics that we think should be changed, the site has been discontinued with no commitment to archiving it for use by the communities who were exhorted to build the forum in the first place. However, these conversations can be accessed via the Internet Archive's Wayback Machine, <http://web.archive.org/web/20120606075809/http://www.healthyeatingmn.org/group/food-justice>.

research (and increasingly even without the presence of food justice researcher-activists like us helping to keep it on the table when it comes up). Yet most participants in the projects we have witnessed still struggle tremendously with figuring out how to bridge racial divides, among other significant divisions. One of the manifestations of such divides is the struggle over resources. Arguments about how to get more resources redirected from the centers of power to the more marginalized often run into the challenges of organizational capacity and grantor requirements. While the larger U.S. food movement grapples with the disintegration of the Community Food Security Coalition and the termination of the Food and Society Program of the Kellogg Foundation, many express a desire to create a different funding approach than that based on the corporate-industrial charity model. Organizations seeking to raise funds to improve food access and/or seek food justice often find themselves stuck between the rock of the funder requirements and the hard place of community demands to radically change the way that food activism is done.²⁴

The flip side of alliances where worm bins take precedence over a firm grasp of what structural racism does, is the use of trauma and inequity as a truncheon wielded against well-meaning white people who do not 'get it.' This is an established problem in anti-racist training and activism that undermines relationships necessary to pursue this work (Lasch-Quinn 1999, 2001). In the following blog discussion referring to an article (Danley 2013) about African Americans reclaiming their food stories, it is possible that A, a white woman, was placing her family's story on par with the historical narrative articulated by B—but not necessarily. Multiple traumas are possible and many stories can be heard without either shutting down conversation or suggesting that all traumas are equal. Both of the voices below are trying to explore trauma, but voice B assumes voice A is making an illegitimate claim to recognize their traumas as equal:

A: It is good for all of us to reclaim our connection to agriculture and the food system. My family has not farmed for four generations, pushed away from production by a fear of losing income or land. This kept us away from farming, and we can reconnect now as gardeners. I know for many other families that did have land taken out from underneath them, that it is even harder to reconnect to agriculture.

B: Well A, I don't know what to say. This is the big *sigh*. My family—at least the [indigenous] side—has 'farmed' here for countless generations. They have been pushed out by a history of conquest, colonialism, and imperialism. We lost our lives and our families as a result of the loss of land and food. Native families experienced this in common over a period of hundreds of years, so... its not fair to say 'we' are all effected in the same way... that it is good for all of 'us' to reclaim a connection to agriculture and the 'food system'... By suggesting we all need to reclaim that relationship erases part of that experience. It's not a comparable experience. We don't experience this loss in nearly the same measure. I know this first hand too. As a mixed blood person, I know that my [ethnic white] relatives did not experience land loss comparable to that of my Native family, as easily as I know that one side of my family benefitted from that loss, in the same way that I benefit from my a measure of privilege because my father is white....I also bristle when anybody starts to talk about land ownership, as though any form of land ownership in the United States is not part of the larger story of our displacement....

July 28, 2013 at 5:20pm in [Food Justice](#)

Unlike antiracism training that can inspire defensiveness, guilt, and sadness, framing trauma and inequity in ways that emphasize potential gains and healing (rather than losses that some think might result from reparations or sharing) and that give people something to look forward to, are recognized as ways to inspire

²⁴ For example, as discussed at the *Future of the Movement* meeting, September 27, 2012, at IATP. The text of the invitation to the Food + Justice = Democracy conference read in part: "The recent unfortunate closing of the Community Food Security Coalition emphasizes that we are in a moment of transition for the food justice movement. CFSC played a pioneering role in the movement for a fair, just and equitable food system. In this current political climate, it is more important than ever that we protect and expand the progress of our movement."

compassion and curiosity (Cameron and Payne 2011; Lindenberg and Steg 2007; Rothman *et al.* 2006). Though not an excuse, the subject of past and present forms of exploitation is difficult for white people to confront. Moving forward with both of these realities in mind may be more productive. Although getting stories into circulation that the dominant history has suppressed is important, it is also necessary to pay attention to when the uses of trauma are pointlessly destructive (see Pratt 2009).

On not addressing justice in food policy action

As the MFJA example above demonstrates, groups often find it hard to keep the themes of trauma, exploitation, dispossession, and labor in active consideration despite recognition of their centrality to the pursuit of food justice, and even despite the explicit attention trained on these themes by at least an active minority of participants in the cases we discuss. Using another case study from Minnesota, this from the southeastern region of the state and focusing on farm labor, we identify three barriers to keeping the discussion going: the ease of doing typical food projects compared to the seemingly overwhelming task of seeking food justice; the silencing of food justice analysis through charity; and the belief that dominant group (white Minnesotans) needs should be acted upon before those of marginalized groups (Latino and other nonwhite and/or undocumented farm laborers).

Southeast Minnesota is the site of an ongoing project to build a regional food policy council (currently constituted as the Healthy Food Alliance of SE MN). Using surveys to understand food activities and concerns of the region, Valentine Cadieux's research team found that participants from a range of food system sectors overwhelmingly ranked social justice issues high on the list of problems to address. Specifically, the statements that "Dangerous food and agriculture jobs are done disproportionately by immigrant and migrant workers" (in the current food system) and that, in an ideal food system, "Food prices allow for decent wages for farm workers or food processors", were ranked at the top (Cadieux *et al.* 2013; Shannon and Cadieux in preparation). Participants explicitly recognized the structural challenges facing migrant labor, but when working groups were proposed to do something about these problems, interest dropped off noticeably. Instead, efforts such as local labeling and consumer education campaigns, capacity building for farmers to connect to new markets, and policy advocacy on behalf of farm owners consistently trumped strategy discussions of immigration reform, labor advocacy, or even attention to systemic trends in food insecurity. Discussions with those involved suggest that this is either because other avenues such as educating consumers appear more doable, or the problem of food injustice seems too daunting.

Food advocates undermined action on food justice by mapping these concerns to existing frameworks. For instance, local food provisioning and anti-hunger advocacy were both significant focal points for people striving to connect their food efforts to social justice. Although programs that expanded gardens to provide poor people, seniors, and immigrant farmers with emergency food were laudable for what they achieved, their presence nonetheless seemed to have thwarted discussion of food justice. Essentially people could list the food shelf and effectively say "food justice, check; we've attended to that." Programs like these allowed the group to sidestep the integration of a systemic analysis into their strategies to improve the regional food system. These programs, with their conspicuous sponsorship by dominant food market actors in Minnesota, also may be contributing to the emphasis that food activists place on market mechanisms for addressing food system problems.

In contrast to the survey results referred to above, participant observation showed an interest in addressing the problems of white society before those of non-dominant groups. This perspective combined with the sidestepped systemic analysis and translated into working groups that were not accessible to all and alliances that were not built. Participants did not see the structural barriers to access for certain populations. For instance, many agreed with the statement "Healthy food is available to less mobile populations like the elderly, agricultural workers, and people without cars" in places where this is demonstrably not the case. Even when food justice *was* identified as crucial, and local organizations doing food justice work were identified, connecting with these organizations was not only de-prioritized, it was often displaced in conversation. Opportunities for alliance with organizations addressing labor exploitation in the SE MN area exist: Centro Campesino seeks to build relationships between farm owners and laborers in the region, and the Agricultural Justice Program, a fair labor certification project, was launched in Minnesota by founding members of the SE

MN regional food policy network. While these opportunities are actively pursued by some individuals, such alliance-building was not incorporated in any of the collective organizing decisions of the group (Cadieux *et al.*, 2013; Shannon and Cadieux in prep.).

4. Getting unstuck: conditions for practicing food justice

The elements that contribute to a predominantly white group's capacity to move toward food justice practice include:

- the clear recognition of the need to work for systemic change based on knowledge of inequality as well as the willingness to do so;
- expressions of solidarity and alliance-building to work toward these changes;
- and, local projects to anchor ongoing collaboration.

We consider these three conditions in more detail in this section. It is the *process* by which these components unfold that remains fundamental to successful food justice advocacy and it is this process that needs to be studied in much greater detail than what we have seen in the food justice literature so far. As one prominent Minnesota food justice advocate argues, those organizing and studying food justice projects need to be intentional about creating space for the aspirations of the people with whom they work. If a project can successfully do that, then he said, "we'll work with you, and if not, we won't waste our time." This point has been recognized at the highest levels. Speaking on the difficult steps toward building sustainable food systems, Olivier De Schutter, the previous FAO Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food eloquently argues, "...we must ensure that the weakest, the most disempowered and marginalized take part in shaping the answers, in identifying the solutions.... In many cases, they know exactly what is needed...we must include participation in our governance systems" (De Schutter 2012). Based on the differential success of those who attend to these themes, it seems, majority-white, middle class coalitions or NGOs will need to understand that at least some of the elements we suggest below are necessary. Meanwhile, people who fall outside that position of white or middle class will be testing them—though not from a position of guaranteed authenticity or with any inherently greater ability to address internal hierarchies.²⁵

Research and critical reflexivity

Fruitful means to enable people to acknowledge and actively address structural inequalities are essential to practicing food justice. Reflecting on what she learned from the process of undertaking a community food assessment in Missoula, Montana, Maxine Jacobson writes:

[i]n hindsight, speaking directly about power and its various manifestations would have fostered individual learning about the reproduction of social inequalities, the difficulties inherent in promoting low-income community members' participation, and forced the project participants to understand the broader consequences of mirroring the white privilege and racial oppression characteristic of broader societal institutions. Participants could have learned how meaning systems collide, how knowledge is power, and how power can be used to replicate relationships of domination or forge new ones based on collaboration. Nonetheless, this issue planted the seed for a subsequent project that addressed the short-comings noted in this regard (Jacobson 2007: 49-50).

Whether as a scholar engaged in research action or a practitioner, understanding and bringing power relations into the open is essential—a point about which we are often reminded (Alinsky 1971; Freire 1973; Korten and Klauss 1984; Rocheleau and Slocum 1995), but which we may not be emphasizing adequately in the culture of food scholarship and practice.

²⁵ In other words, a marginalized subject position may offer a 'view from below' but does not have total claim over truth.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unemployment • Employment by sector • Land ownership • Residential segregation • Affordable housing availability, lead paint abatement/exposure • Home ownership • Foreclosure rates • Gentrification • Lending • Proximity to hazards and amenities • Health disparities, excess death, suicide rates, domestic violence • Internet access • Public service provision • High school graduation, graduation in 4 years, suspension rates, student/teacher ratio, school resources 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community organizations and their issues of concern • Business ownership, worker-owned businesses • Incarceration rates, rates of state violence • Wealth and income • Car ownership • Retirement assets • Transportation access and cost • Single women heads of households • Food sources, food meaning, food desires • Food insecurity/hunger • Assets, strengths, abundances (i.e., not only focus on scarcity, deficits, insufficiencies) • What sense of this place do people have? What past and present relationship do they have to this space? What future do they see? What concerns exist in marginalized communities, what do they want you to do? What are their versions of any of these above bullet points?
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Figure 1: Mapping power: suggested data needs for understanding the materiality of systemic racism, gender inequality, and class hierarchy in place.

An understanding of the materiality of institutionalized racism specifically would suggest knowing some of the information in Figure 1 (see e.g. Wallace 2008).²⁶ Such research allows a coalition to better grasp the realities of structural violence, which then may better enable them to pose good questions, determine useful points of intervention, find areas where they might express solidarity, and collect the background data for specific programmatic or policy changes. Knowing the geography of racial inequality may help a group be more legible (and more able to act) as a viable ally. It may lead to particular analyses, questions and ways of engaging with a community such as those evident in the Greene Hill Food Coop's Food Justice Committee meeting minutes. In a discussion about a survey of community members, the first question was whether a survey was a good means to reach out to the community. Brainstorming survey questions brought: "What would make the co-op look more welcoming in terms of appearance? What does a welcoming shopping environment look like? *Does the storefront look like a white space?*" (our italics)." At the end of the notes they ask, "Discussion of gentrification—is this the issue we should be focusing on?" (GHFC 2013). In these questions, we see routes toward using food to work for greater fairness in society. These questions link issues of concern to the place where the work is being done to forces operating at other scales. Demonstrating its understanding of the race and class geography of North Oakland, California, the food justice organization Phat Beets writes:

[a]s a food justice organization, Phat Beets Produce does not only work to support small farmers and farmers of color ... we also work to critique the institutionally racist policies that have led to the lack of access to healthy food in historically low-income communities of color in the first place, specifically North Oakland. For example, with the migration of blacks to urban areas like Oakland for jobs prior to and during World War II, city and federal government subsequently subsidized freeway construction and suburban home ownership for whites. This reallocation of public funds and private capital toward suburbs left the urban core without the resources and institutions it needed to flourish, including but not limited to grocery stores. This disinvestment has created the opportunities for new investment, with displacement being the natural consequence of an entirely unnatural gentrification process that we see unfolding before our eyes in North Oakland (2013).

²⁶ These proposed data needs derive from scholarship and discussions in Rachel Slocum's research and activism. She suggested them to the MFJA as data that would be important to decision making about what the MFJA did and how it undertook that action. They have been refined in the research and discussion leading to this article.

Critical reflexivity can come through research that allows people to question their assumptions. University of Minnesota Extension staff worked with the Fond du Lac band of Anishanabe on a series of projects (13Moons, Ojibwe Garden, and Compass Project) that aimed to reconnect people with the environment, develop social networks, and sustain culture.²⁷ There was significant interest in using foraging, gardens and hunting as a way to realize project goals. Because of the high level of diet-related disease among reservation residents, Extension staff started a demonstration and teaching garden from which emerged a farm market, and a pilot CSA. While the garden was technically a success, few community members came to work or learn in the garden and few used the farmers' market. Although 90 people applied to be part of the pilot CSA (which was free), of the ten selected to participate only 4 completed the program and most did not pick up their shares. To respond to these failures, Extension and the Fond du Lac band developed the Gwayakosijigan (Compass) Project to capture what the food system looked like to them via participant-drawn maps, and then to compare the maps to what the food system looked like to the project team. People were asked to designate places where they a) got food most frequently, b) got the most food, c) felt were the most culturally important places to get food, and d) spent the most money on food. Participants were also asked to describe what enhances, enables, impedes, and blocks their access to food. Inhibiting factors were lack of money, poor roads, and lack of a car. Being part of particular social networks with information about wild food sources enhanced access, but this knowledge was readily accessible only to a few who were part of a select group of families who practiced such lifeways. Other enablers were freezers, being able to hunt, and good budgeting (Wilsey 2013; Bennett *et al.* 2013).

The Compass project discovered that people got most of their food from an area grocery store and Wal-Mart. Wild food sources were identified as the most culturally important. In all, there were 90 sources of food revealing that, contrary to popular assumption, the reservation was not a food desert. Those who participated thought that they ate well and were healthy, which raised the question for the project team—who gets to decide whether residents eat well or are in poor health? After reflecting on this experience, the team decided that farmers' markets are *not* a solution to poor health. They concluded that while a market can be a part of the solution, if its purpose is to provide access to fresh food then, at least in this case, it is probably not going to be meeting an unmet need (because fresh food is available at other venues). In other words, the market might provide a number of other benefits, but should not be positioned as an intervention designed to fill one hole in the system. They discovered, further, that one reason some people did not participate in the CSA was due to the heavy presence of kale (*Brassica oleracea*) in weekly shares. Finally, a point they learned from a subset of participants, but did not pursue with the Fond du Lac Band, was that the overall lack of participation was due to the sense that exercise and healthy eating, framed as such, were white behaviors. A few in the age range of 35-50 felt this more strongly whereas younger and older people were less likely to associate organic food, kale, and exercise with whiteness. The team observed that traumas and stressors were notable and seemed to affect food decisions and actions. Emphasizing this significant trauma and stress, David Wilsey argued that these elements are important to consider in food projects (Wilsey 2013). Other scholars suggest that food projects resulting from alliance between indigenous and non-indigenous people in settler societies must acknowledge different experiences of trauma (Grossman 2001, 2003; Lyons 2005; Smith 1999). In any event, the observations drawn after re-examining presuppositions in the Compass Project, are precisely the sort that any organization involved in this kind of programming must make.

Once you know it, show it: solidarity and alliance-building

Recognition of structural violence can come through public expressions of solidarity. For instance, Phat Beets lists [links](#) to organizations working on police brutality, [housing](#) rights and gentrification, reproductive rights, transportation justice and medical assistance among others. Its home page featured a position on the case of Trayvon Martin, an unarmed black teenager who, in an application of Florida's Stand Your Ground law, was 'legally' shot and killed as he walked home (See also <http://comfoodjustice.org/2013/07/16/july-message/>). Phat Beets wrote:

²⁷ We are grateful to David Wilsey for his willingness to provide clarifications and corrections.

[...W]e see the legal justice denied to our young, black brother in Trayvon [Martin] as consistent with the racialized processes outlined above. But it is precisely this reason that racial justice must be foregrounded in our movements, as food justice and racial justice are one fist, raised high by our convictions for collective liberation. And while Phat Beets may not work directly to change a criminal 'justice' system that adopts unjust laws such as 'Stand Your Ground', we stand in solidarity with organizations and efforts made in that direction and will continue aligning our values and principles with those who walk hand-in-hand with justice, liberation and love (2013).

Similarly, the Brooklyn Food Coalition writes "our agri-food system can't be considered sustainable while it yields structural inequities of food access and quality for different people based on race and endures commercially through the routine labor exploitation mostly of people of color" (2013).

Understanding structural violence and showing solidarity provide a more firm foundation for alliances. In the SE MN example, alliance-building was enabled by the combination of the undeniable need to address problematic inequities in the food system, and the impossibility of one small group of people addressing these problems alone. These two aspects of the situation encouraged a collaborative mindset that simultaneously called for active alliance-building and reduced the need to imagine a small group achieving the daunting goal of food justice with only their local action. Equally crucial was the *ability* to form alliances. If groups cannot figure out how to ally with farm worker organizations because they don't know people in such organizations, there is a greater chance that food justice will remain an unrealized aspiration (as the MJFA example also bears out). The desire to address specific injustices may have held open space for action, but the dissonance between action and aspiration itself became a significant source of continued *inaction*. The commonly held sentiment was that the group had done everything it could to reach out.

In this case, as in many, getting stuck was most effectively addressed by active translation—often by advocacy groups for immigrants, laborers, or other justice-oriented NGOs, who helped to induct food activists into justice work, showed what was being done, and revealed the connections that might be possible. Having the resources to do this induction is crucial but difficult as NGOs struggle over the same funding pie. Moving forward was also aided by having a local project that provided concrete tasks (e.g. the expansion of community gardens with the explicit goal of addressing hunger or the Agricultural Justice Project). The need to explain to the broader alliance how those projects met the ideal of social justice meant the ideal remained in play. However, the work of alliance-building was often hampered by defensiveness on both sides (often warranted), and required a tremendous investment of time and effort, a condition that unfortunately contributed to serious concerns about the demands of this type of work on one's time.

Making guidelines for practice available before uncomfortable conversations start, for instance, is critical. At the Food + Justice = Democracy conference Sam Grant and Zea Leguizamon of the Movement Center for Deep Democracy led each afternoon's move from plenary presentations to People's Movement Assembly-format working groups. They used exercises that asked people to explicitly acknowledge the embodied and relational experience of food justice work, and to turn to each other and commit to 'having each other's backs' over the course of what were likely to be challenging conversations about the principles of food justice. People in at least some of the groups were able to take this seriously, particularly around the topic of addressing trauma. In those cases, several participants took on the tasks of 'refereeing' when someone made the conversation uncomfortable for someone else or backed up other participants when they were struggling to express difficult ideas, particularly critiques. In one such case, an older white man from a farming background asked a series of provocative questions trying to get food justice advocates to connect their contemporary work with the history of farm advocacy and the trauma of farm loss. But he did so in a way that was unselfconsciously reproducing Christian white male privilege in a context where that was difficult for some to hear. A number of co-participants in his discussion groups gently intervened to ask him to try to make his arguments in different ways. The response could have been hostile but with people watching out for each other, even if they raised questions others might not like, there was support for trying again. In this case the intervention succeeded in supporting this man's willingness and ability to try other ways to make his point that more successfully paid attention to the experiences of his colleagues. This also made it easier for others to

enter the conversation, knowing that even if they did not get the conversation 'right', they would be supported in articulating and exploring their experiences of trauma.

Without institutionalizing accountability and transparency, a participatory, democratic process tends not to happen in alliances (Hetherington 2011; Innes and Booher 1999; Jordan *et al.* 2011; Kloppenburg 2010; Margerum 2002; Salter, Robinson, and Wiek 2010). Figure 2 gathers some of the collective wisdom on organizational process from antiracism advocacy within the food movement (derived from Slocum 2006). In interviews held in 2003-4, most food movement organizations were not thinking about or implementing these ideas. Though we have seen increasing identification with some of these principles in the ensuing decade, they are easier to identify than to put into practice.

Decenter race, class, gender privilege

- Recognize white privilege as a societal (rather than individual) problem;
- Privileged step back and let less privileged speak, act, lead, which does not mean that all expert knowledge is dismissed; space is made to explore differences in legitimacy claims;
- Privileged work to become allies, but this should not be seen as a goal forever out of reach to them;
- Recognize that the work of confronting racism takes effort and is difficult for everyone;
- In projects and policy solutions challenge the racist policies and practices central to the development and persistence of the industrial food system.

Coalitions and power

- Acknowledge that organizations are built around relationships, and attend to those relationships;
- Acknowledge historical trauma in ways that do not discount anyone's/any group's trauma;
- Give space to people of color organizations to build coalitions from a position of strength;
- Share resources in ways that are transparent and accountable;
- Express solidarity with social change efforts outside the food system;
- Negotiate meaningful ways to set and evaluate goals;
- Allow conflict to emerge and be discussed.

Organizational accountability

- Ask who benefits from the partnership, project, decision, etc.;
- Provide stable support for projects;
- Understand, support, and raise up accomplishments of community partners;
- Aim resource allocation, rhetorical practices, policy advocacy at shifting the balance of power toward historically oppressed groups in order to enable problem identification, leadership, and solutions to develop within these communities;
- Ask whether your organization has benefited from damage done to others;
- Work to repair past damage, both that in which institutional partners share culpability and that in which they may not;
- Address issues that low-income communities and communities of color have identified as crucial (i.e., living wage jobs, housing, child-care, even supermarket development, etc.);
- Build supports to raise people of color and women to leadership positions.

Figure 2: Organizational practice toward food justice

Although we may see cross-sector and -identity alliance as extremely important, not everyone does. Conversations in the course of our research indicate that there are some food justice/sovereignty advocates, in this case representatives of indigenous and nonwhite groups, with little interest in engaging the mainstream food movement, changing food policy or interacting with university faculty or students. Some of these advocates favor more radical control (see also McCutcheon 2009), that is, agricultural endeavors to feed a particular group of people or a specific number of households, which derives from a sense that the state is failing (not only that it has failed them specifically), conventional food is poisonous, and the capacity to feed themselves must be developed. But we see value in alliances even when they are not fully aligned. Part of the value of combining action and research is the identification and articulation of substantive agreement and disagreement, allowing different intensities of strategic collaboration and independent action.

Concerns about whether the process toward food justice is worth all the time it takes are most effectively met with the acknowledgement that without addressing justice, food projects will not be successful. Although the growing consensus around this idea may be part of what is driving the broader

symbolic adoption of food justice as a label, it may also be contributing to conditions in which more people are willing to explore food justice in practice, and to value the contributions of those who can translate between aspiration and practice.

5. No food justice, no peace: conclusions

We address this intervention to scholars and practitioners to model our commitment to praxis (combining reflection with action). To scholars, we suggest **first** that accountability in research requires a more rigorous analysis of what constitutes food justice 'in practice' and how it might differ from what we have known as the food movement. Part of this accountability is engaging with relevant scholarship and activism that has gone before (such as that on antiracist scholarship and advocacy). Within the nodes we proposed around which food justice organizing coalesces (trauma/inequity, exchange, land, and labor), we argue, **second**, for more process-oriented documentation of barriers and enabling conditions—those places where the process toward food justice gets stuck, and ways those sticking points can be loosened. **Third**, although it is important to showcase the struggles of dispossessed groups, an essentialist and tautological reading is implicit in some of this work: food justice is a movement of marginalized people of color who do food justice because they are marginalized people of color. We argue more work needs to be done to document how food justice happens in all contexts, including in the largely white, middle class efforts dominating the food movement. Those efforts are important to investigate with a supportively critical lens because they exist, muster disproportionately greater amounts of resources, and have significant potential for greater accountability. Such a lens is necessary to direct toward white, mixed, and non-white efforts, yet what we often see is the archetypes of naïve white people on the one hand, and more enlightened, justified, and authentic food justice done by people of color on the other. It is almost too obvious to say that some people of color may engage in business-as-usual food programs and some white people may do transformative food work. **Fourth**, we suggest it is necessary to consider the many small and halting steps, the seemingly insignificant actions that are part of a process of research, reflection, solidarity, and alliance. These are harder to document and harder to make sound as compelling as listing inspiring examples or signaling a desire that oppression be addressed. We do not offer formulaic prescriptions—a 'how to' guide for food justice. Instead, through our examples, we suggest that it is critical to understand how people try to move toward these various goals, get stuck, and deal with being stuck.

Trauma is a conceptual means to bring greater strength to the notion of food justice in scholarship, and it is critically important to address in food justice organizing. For scholarship, trauma brings the body into food justice in potentially useful ways whether it's the emotional body, the body living under intense stress, or the body seeking to survive in all of the ways the term connotes. Addressing the emotional and embodied sides of oppression in practice is extremely difficult, and can be destructive or superficial. The possibility of reproducing trauma (not healing it) on the part of those experiencing trauma or seeking to address it raises the stakes for food justice work. Academic approaches are often notoriously in tension with the time required, vulnerability experienced, and difficulty of navigating the complex relationships of these situations. To allow explicit and substantive process analyses that support more productive engagement with discomfort and give credit where it is due, these approaches need revision.

We write from the experience of trying to work as academics with activists and we argue for the utility of that engagement, despite it being relatively unsupported by universities as well as by practitioners themselves. Our aim here is to offer a caring critique of both academic and practitioner efforts by pinpointing where collective action falters and by outlining practices that can enable food justice. Driving reflexive praxis are the questions:

- What work does a critique do, and how does it move us toward justice?
- Having modeled the process of asking such questions and demonstrated the way that we incorporate the answers into our ongoing process, we are better positioned to ask of our collaborators "is this action leading to more justice"? How? How do we know?
- How do we compare our knowledge with that gained from other perspectives and other knowledge cultures (see Gunaratnam 2003; Wilson 2008)?

The two cases from Minnesota document how justice came to be submerged under worm bins and food shelves. Our case studies show that while people are ready to act collectively for food system fairness, there is great variety in their capacity to understand the extent of structural change such access requires, and in their willingness to keep discussions of trauma and inequity in active consideration. It is difficult for white people and people of color to talk about these subjects, for different reasons. The conversation around the fraught subject of inequity and trauma can be shut down quickly if methods are not institutionalized to prevent that disaster. Praxis takes time and repetition; it can be frustrating to revisit the same arguments again and again (especially for those who live the experience of structural violence). Time and repetition is necessary because most people need to explore these problems themselves to be able to acknowledge the ways that food chain workers, subsistence farmers, and indigenous people have been so marginalized.

Our proposals to practitioners for 'getting unstuck' were as follows. **First**, this work requires some research (for which alliances with academics might be helpful). **Second**, we suggest actively acknowledging the impact structural inequalities have had on people. **Third**, reflexivity to be able to ask good questions is critical, but equally essential is institutionalizing the practices that allow questions to be asked (such as having each other's backs). **Fourth**, it is important to speak out in solidarity, a practice that, with these other elements, helps to create alliances with social justice advocates who work with disenfranchised groups and builds relationships in the social context of these groups.

The elements we have proposed are not a recipe; they are a process whereby people with greater privilege know, perhaps feel, and definitely act on the way that food is situated within systemic processes that disadvantage people of color, women, the impoverished and disabled. In her book on climate justice activism, Naomi Klein provocatively argues:

...fighting inequality on every front and by multiple means must be understood as a central strategy in the battle against climate change" ... "[t]hat means that a fight for a minimal carbon tax might do a lot less good than, for instance, forming a coalition to demand a guaranteed minimum income" (Klein 2014: 94, 461).

We see her proposal as applicable to the U.S. food movement as well. The economic security of a basic income, among other redistributive measures, is necessary for the well being of women (see Folbre 2011; Weeks 2011) and the increasing numbers of impoverished in this country. Moreover, as those who turned out in the streets, in print, on the airwaves, and online in the wake of the Ferguson, Missouri shooting have shown us, there can be no peace without an end to state violence. By state violence in this context, we mean not only black deaths at the hands of the state, but all of the ways that racism has been institutionalized across housing, banking, employment, criminal justice, political representation, military service, wealth accumulation, health and, of course, growing, selling, and eating food. Such changes are needed for (climate and) food justice.

As we have pointed out in this article and the preceding article (Cadieux and Slocum 2015), scholars and activists have shaped the sense of food justice and food sovereignty that now circulates in neighborhoods and global fora. Originating in the global north and south respectively, these radical directives have different historical antecedents shaping their visions and strategies. They arise out of different yet related needs of the excluded *majority*, "the indigenous, youth, [elderly], women, homosexuals, lesbians, people of color, immigrants, workers, peasants ...who make up the world basements" (EZLN 1996). Food justice and food sovereignty aim to create non-alienating and less exploitative value and exchange systems by wresting control of livelihoods and consumption from the fast, dangerous, globalized, fossil-fuel dependent, corporate-concentrated, pesticide-ridden model. Focusing on institutionalized inequality in work and wealth, opportunity and health, food justice demands fairness for all. Integrating a progressive sense of place in analysis and action, food sovereignty links livelihoods, inseparably, to ecological wellbeing. For both, socio-ecological justice must be the foundation for agri-food systems. As food systems are buffeted by the storms of a warmer planet and finance capitalism, corporate and academic agro-science sectors claim that justice is something that might be considered if there is time and inclination, but only *after* the issue of production has been confronted through techno-neoliberal strategies to 'feed the world.' It is therefore incumbent upon scholars and practitioners to make clear how it is, instead, socially just agri-food systems that provide food security and to show what makes those systems possible.

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