Conceptualizing Just Food in Alternative Agrifood Initiatives

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Abstract: *In the United States, an increasing number of localized and community-based agrifood networks have recently emerged as people attempt to reclaim food sovereignty by modeling just and sustainable alternatives to the dominant paradigm of corporate industrial food production. However, many of these networks fail to recognize broader structural inequalities that contribute to disparities in food access and thus face challenges in building truly inclusive, empowering and transformative food systems. In this paper, I examine the concept of food justice as an organizing principle in alternative agrifood movement discourse and praxis, tracing its evolution through associated concepts such as food security, food sovereignty and the right to food. I argue that food justice offers a valuable framework for examining equity and justice in agrifood networks by attending to how these networks are raced, classed and gendered in ways that may reiterate existing inequalities and exclude people from participating. From this perspective I then examine the role of alternative agrifood networks in the broader context of food justice advocacy work, and ask whether farm security and food security goals might once again converge in this context.*

In the United States, an increasing number of localized and community-based agrifood networks have recently emerged as people attempt to reclaim food sovereignty by modeling just and sustainable alternatives to the dominant paradigm of corporate industrial food production. Motivations for participation in such alternative agrifood networks have included improved access to fresh, local, healthy food grown without pesticides; ecological stewardship; support of family farms and the farming way of life; support of the local economy; strengthening of community; and resistance

to corporate globalization. However, many of these networks fail to recognize broader structural inequalities that contribute to disparities in food access and thus face challenges in building truly inclusive, empowering and transformative food systems.

As Allen et al. (2003) note, most alternative agrifood projects [in the US] seem to share a common political goal in opposing the global food system and creating alternatives that are environmentally sustainable, economically viable and socially just (p. 61). Indeed, Allen (2004) points out that sustainable agriculture ideology has historically encompassed joint goals of environmentalism and social justice. However, she observes that the movement's justice priorities have faded over time, with more attention to its environmentalist and populist components, such that many current sustainable agriculture advocates—and I would argue many anti-hunger activists as well—see little connection between sustainable agriculture and issues of hunger (Allen 2004:199). From the sustainable agriculture standpoint, concerns regarding farm security often trump those of food security, as the need for cheap food seems contradictory to the need for fair prices for farmers, a point illustrated through interviews conducted with farmers market and CSA managers in California (Guthman et al. 2006). From the anti-hunger standpoint, meeting people's basic needs is often the most pressing concern and while sustainable agriculture projects may play a small part in meeting these needs, there may be other more readily accessible and familiar resources to draw on including charitable and governmental assistance.

Some food activists however do see a stronger connection between hunger issues and sustainable agriculture, and as Guthman et al. (2006) point out, the anti-hunger and sustainable agriculture movements have made a "strategic alliance" to combine the goals of both farm security and food security through more comprehensive, local food

system approaches such as those based in the Community Food Security movement. And yet, despite such efforts to reshape food systems along more equitable lines, Allen et al. (2003) remark on the extent to which many alternative agrifood participants accept the given institutional structures and social relations of the current food system, failing to imagine a truly new way forward. Thus, as Guthman et al. (2006) argue, the twin goals of farm and food security may, in the end, be incompatible.

In this paper, I examine the concept of food justice as an organizing principle in alternative agrifood movement discourse and praxis. I trace the evolution of food justice through the continually shifting, diverging and converging definitions and ideologies of food security, food sovereignty and the right to food. I argue that food justice offers a valuable framework for examining equity and justice in agrifood networks by attending to how these networks are raced, classed and gendered, and situated within broader power-privilege relations at multiple scales. From this perspective I then examine the role of alternative agrifood networks in the broader context of food justice advocacy work, and ask whether farm security and food security goals might once again converge in this context.

A Genealogy of the Food Justice Framework

The food justice framework can be understood within the context of evolving discourses and practices of food security, food sovereignty and right to food. What is unique about the food justice lens is that it situates these discourses and practices within multiple and interlocking systems of inequality across lines of differentiation such as race, class and gender, as well as across spatial scales. But first, it is helpful to understand the historical development of these originating concepts and how they contribute to the food

justice framework.

The concept of food security has existed in various forms for some time, arising from concerns about hunger both within the U.S. and internationally. According to Patricia Allen (1999) domestic federal food assistance programs were first developed during the depression to address the dual problems of farm surpluses and urban hunger.

Then after World War II, the ideal of food security emerged as a focus of international development efforts. Boosted by yield increases from Green Revolution technologies, the United States implemented the Marshall Plan, which directed U.S. agricultural surpluses toward European countries whose agricultural sectors were devastated in the war (Patel 2007). However, once European farmers recovered, the U.S. was unable to retain their markets and had to find other ways to dispose of their surpluses (Patel 2007). At the same time, colonial independence movements were responding to the continual food shortages engendered by emphasis on export agriculture and market infrastructures (McMichael 2003:170), and many in the global North were afraid these countries might entertain the idea of communism as a result (Patel 2007). The solution according to the U.S. was to strategically direct agricultural surpluses to these developing countries as hunger relief, in an attempt at political dissuasion (McMichael 2003; Patel 2007). As Patel (2007) put it, "the hungry might be rendered less troubled, more grateful and, in a new twist, more *dependent* if provided with cheap food" (90-91, emphasis in original). Thus the Agricultural Trade Development and Assistance Act of 1954, also known as PL (Public Law) 480 was born. Patel (2007) calls PL 480 a "powerful policy tool" through which radical dissent was suppressed as the U.S. delivered its surpluses to needy countries in the name of national food security, and "those located near socialist countries were bumped to the front of the line" (p. 91). Since

that time, food aid in the name of food security has been a consistent tactic deployed in foreign policy and development efforts (McMichael 2003; Patel 2007). According to Patel (2007), one of the consequences of such policy was that the subsidized surpluses delivered by the U.S. flooded the market with artificially cheap grain, undercutting local production and "hooking countries of the Global South on U.S. largesse" (2007:91). Predictably, this arrangement worked out to the benefit of U.S. agricultural interests and was one of the ways in which the U.S. secured its hegemony in the global agriculture market.

Back within the U.S., the 1960s saw the rise of the anti-hunger movement in the context of civil rights activism and Right to Food discourse. During this time a number of social programs addressing hunger were developed including food stamps, school lunches and WIC, the special supplemental nutrition program for women, infants and children (Allen 1999). However, these programs served other interests as well, including those of the food and agriculture industries, linking the U.S. influence over the global market to the provisioning of cheap food to urban consumers domestically, helping to quell discontent among the working class by keeping their bellies full (Allen 1999; Patel 2007; McMichael 2003).

Internationally, by the 1960s and 70s, implementation of Green Revolution technologies was well underway in other countries such as India, assisted by the U.S., once again in the name of national food security (Patel 2007; McMichael 2003). During this time, international food security was constructed simultaneously as the measuring rod of the UN-based Right to Food discourse and as a way of promoting world trade (Bellows and Hamm 2002:33). Indeed, at the 1974 World Food Conference, food security was defined as "the availability at all times of adequate world food supplies of basic foodstuffs to sustain steady

expansion of food consumption… and to offset fluctuations in production and prices" (Mechlem 2004:633, quoting 1974 FAO report). Food security thus meant, according to Allen (1999:118), "the ability of a country to procure enough food to feed its population". It is interesting to note that this definition articulates food availability within world supplies, couching food security in terms of available commodities on the international market rather than regional or even national self-reliance. Further, its scale is limited to that of the nation, obscuring the finer points of internal distribution, and does not articulate what kind or quality of food is to be made available. As we have seen, this positioning of food security intersects with the role of U.S. food aid in foreign policy in telling ways.

Then in 1981, hunger theory was turned on its head when Amartya Sen proved that hunger was not the result of a lack of available food, but rather the inability of an individual to access, or effectively claim an entitlement to, enough food (Mechlem 2004; Patel 2007; Bellows and Hamm 2002). Sen's work showed how, despite adequate national supplies, food security at the individual level could be affected by a number of other factors including poverty, inequality and undemocratic governments (Mechlem 2004; Blatt 2008). With this new frame came a focus on food security at the scale of the individual and household, along with distinctions between chronic, seasonal and temporary food security (Mechlem 2004). The recognition that access to food is linked with control over income and resources also made it clear that individual food security might still be constrained even in food secure households, often to the disadvantage of women and children (Mechlem 2004).

These revelations were incorporated into the 1996 World Food Summit definition of food security:

> food security, at the individual, household, national, regional and global levels is achieved when all people, at all times, have physical and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food to meet their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life (Mechlem 2004:636, quoting the FAO).

As Mechlem notes, this definition illustrates a shift in the unit level of analysis, an attention to quality and an inclusion of the broader context (2004:637).

During the same time however, the neoliberal ideology of the 1990s "identified the world market as the vehicle of state development" and so food security, particularly in the international trade arena, was understood even more in terms of the market than before (McMichael 2003:170). With the 1994 Uruguay Round, agricultural products that were previously excluded from GATT (General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade), were now included in free trade terms, securing the commodification of food (Bellows and Hamm 2002:34). Prior to this point, governments were more or less free and able to protect their own agricultural sectors and thus their domestic food supplies through the use of farmer subsidies and taxes and tariffs on imported food. However, with the inclusion of agricultural products in the GATT, such measures contradicted free trade regulations. Action taken by governments to protect local food supplies could be viewed as an impediment to free trade. This shift toward food-as-commodity allowed for the "subordination of food to capital" where food provisioning is no longer socially or politically guaranteed as a public necessity, but rather is accessed privately through the market by those with control over enough capital (McMichael 2003:173). A consequence of this condition is that although food might be physically available on the shelves of local stores it is not accessible

if people cannot afford to buy it, effectively excluding people already marginalized by trade liberalization. In this vein, Bellows and Hamm (2002) note the statement by the European Commission in 1996 that food security policy and practice was actually incompatible with the rules of the WTO (p. 34).

A further consequence of the inclusion of agricultural products in trade liberalization was the shift in many countries from production primarily for domestic markets to production for international markets. Indeed, through the structural adjustment programs implemented in countries indebted to the World Bank, agriculture was reoriented toward export to countries in the North to repay loans, as such markets were more profitable than production for domestic consumption (Patel 2007:95). The catch here however was that farmers were exposed to a larger, more volatile market and lost the benefit of price signals, making farming, particularly on a small scale, an even more precarious proposition. In these ways, the ability of national governments and their agricultural sectors to ensure food security for their people was hindered.

Given this history and context then, it becomes clear that "food security" has operated primarily as a policy concept, applicable at many scales and subject to contestation and redefinition according to the interests of who defines it and prevailing political winds. Similarly, McMichael (2003) states that the changing meaning of food security "reflects the transformation of development ideology, from a public project deploying foreign aid to support the ideal of the 'development state,' to a private project of marketing of the state and deepening the commodification of food. That is, food security has been incorporated into the privatization of public functions associated with corporate globalization and its neoliberal regime" (p. 169). McMichael continues on to note that the contradiction in such 'free'-market

based approaches is that they exacerbate food insecurity and inequality, particularly among the most vulnerable (2003:169). Along these lines, Fred Magdoff (2008) remarks,

> the present availability of food to people reflects very unequal economic and political power relationships within and between countries. A sustainable and secure food system requires a different and much more equitable relationship among people (p. 15).

To counter such neoliberal orientations, some authors like Kerstin Mechlem (2004) return to the grounding principles of the Right to Food discourse. Although substantively similar to the 1996 World Food Summit definition of food security, the Right to Food perspective frames food access as a basic, individual human right for which the state can be held legally accountable (Mechlem 2004). Mechlem draws on the definition put forth by the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights which defines the right to food as "the right of everyone to have physical and economic access at all times to food in adequate quantity and quality, or to means of its procurement" (2004:638). From this framework, Mechlem argues that people are agents rather than objects, shifting their position from 'beneficiaries' to 'claimants,' as the state has legal obligations to respect, protect and fulfill the right to adequate food (Mechlem 2004:646;649). This right to food approach has contributed significantly to the food justice framework, which works from a rights-based premise, but as we have seen it is also subject to cooptation.

Another counterpoint to the common food security discourse is that of food sovereignty. According to Holt-Giménez (2009), food sovereignty is "literally, people's self-government of the food system," involving democratic control over all its constituent parts, "from production and processing,

to distribution, marketing and consumption" (p. 146). McMichael (2003) argues that the "political ideal" of food sovereignty was put forth as a response to the marketization of food security (p. 170), a way of reappropriating what had been co-opted by corporate interests. McMichael argues that while "the question of food security is about the corporate model attempting to suppress the alternative Agroecological model in a strategy to secure the rights of capital and the profits of agribusiness," food sovereignty reframes the discourse "as a substantive political, social, cultural and ecological program to restore and revitalize forms of social reproduction anchored in democratic community organization" (McMichael 2003:188). Similarly, Kopka (2008) notes that the food sovereignty framework provides for both a politics of resistance, and an emerging mode of development (p. 46). Indeed, Holt-Giménez (2009) remarks on how the movement toward food sovereignty is built from the ground up and is based in the peasantry, a contrast from other agricultural and development models that work from a top-down, market-based perspective. Through community-based popular education and political organizing, food sovereignty activists are working to restore local food economies, imagining and creating new models of collective land and waterway control, building opportunities and future leadership for urban and rural youth, promoting sustainable agriculture as a solution to climate change, and working to dismantle structural racism, partnering with other social movements world-wide (La Via Campesina 2010).[i]

As leaders of the food sovereignty movement, La Via Campesina (the Peasant Way) is an international organization of peasant farmers, small-scale food producers, activist groups and others whose political platform is based on advocacy and organizing around the principles of food sovereignty described above. They define food sovereignty as "the peoples', countries' or state unions right to define their

agricultural and food policy, without any dumping vis-à-vis third countries" (Via Campesina 2003). Such a definition includes the prioritization of local agricultural production for the peoples' consumption before export. As Kopka (2008) states, "food is a source of nutrition, only secondarily an item of trade" (p. 46). To achieve this self-sufficiency, Kopka argues, peasants and the landless need access to water, seeds and credit, with implications for land reform, biotechnology and water management. The definition of food sovereignty also includes: the right of people to decide what they consume and how it was produced; the right of countries to protect themselves from artificially low-priced agricultural and food imports; market prices commensurate with production costs; participation in agricultural policy choices; and the recognition of women farmers' rights (Via Campesina 2003). This position presents an alternative to the neoliberal policies tied to issues of food security discussed above, arguing that the Word Trade Organization needs to get out of agriculture, as food is a basic human right and should not be treated as a commodity. The right to food "can only be realized in a system where food sovereignty is guaranteed," that is, when countries are allowed to support their agriculture in order to meet the food needs of their populations (Via Campesina 1998:22). In this way, food sovereignty is positioned as a necessary precondition to food security (Via Campesina 1998). Indeed, the concept of food sovereignty shifts the political focus somewhat from the predominantly urban-based consumption side of the food system equation toward the social and economic relations in rural agricultural production worldwide. Miguel Altieri (2009) affirms the position taken by La Via Campesina, asserting that "only by changing the export-led, free trade based, industrial agriculture model of large farms can the downward spiral of poverty, low wages, rural-urban

migration, hunger and environmental degradation be halted" (p. 111).

In addition to challenging broader neoliberal agendas, Patel (2007) notes how food sovereignty also attends to differences in power relations on a local scale and specifically, how the emphasis on the rights of women farmers "goes for the jugular in many rural societies, opening the door to profound social change starting in the home" (p. 302). Patel goes on to remark that reclaiming control of the food system requires both individual and collective effort, a commitment to equality and democratic deliberation where everyone has a voice, and "the empowerment of society's poorest members to be able to afford to eat differently" (p. 303; p. 310-11). He states that food sovereignty is a political call to action to fight the poverty caused by corporate control of the food system at both ends (production and consumption) arguing that "what happens in the fields and the cities is intimately connected and is part of the same problem, one that requires a political solution" (Patel 2007:316;317). Similarly, Allen (2004) and members of La Via Campesina (2010) remark on the need to link individual efforts such as participation in CSA or community gardens, with larger scale political advocacy efforts such as the creation of food policy councils, changing institutional food purchasing arrangements, calling for fairer trade, aid and investment policies, and demanding the use of public lands for food production, among other measures. For a more thorough discussion on food sovereignty and specific strategies to help attain it, refer to the work of La Via Campesina, among others.

This vision of food sovereignty shares common elements with an approach to food systems developing in the U.S. called Community Food Security (CFS). Patricia Allen (1999) notes that the movement arose from a need for a more comprehensive approach to food security and so CFS seeks to relink production and consumption by

emphasizing local and regional food systems, and the needs of low-income people. The Community Food Security Coalition defines Community Food Security as "a condition in which all community residents obtain a safe, culturally acceptable, nutritionally adequate diet through a sustainable food system that maximizes community self-reliance and social justice" (Community Food Security Coalition 2009). CFS incorporates six principles: low income food needs; broad goals to address a range of problems including increasing poverty and hunger, loss of family farms, supermarket redlining, suburban sprawl, and other issues; community-oriented self-sufficiency focus; asset-building and empowerment; local agriculture; and systems-oriented, interdisciplinary approaches (Community Food Security Coalition 2009). Like Sen, CFS assumes food insecurity is a function of people's lack of control over their food system and thus emphasizes community self-reliance through the evaluation of community and personal resources rather than the implementation of more conventional entitlements-based approaches like food stamps (Allen 1999). Further, CFS seeks to build such self-reliant, community-based food systems by grounding them in regional agriculture and local decision-making, a departure from traditional anti-hunger activism that has not focused on how or where food is produced (Allen 1999). And yet, Allen notes how in the U.S., the joint objectives of viable regional agriculture and prioritizing the needs of low-income people may be contradictory and the question exists of where to place the emphasis of the movement (Allen 1999:117).

Food Justice

> ...reframing food security as food justice is more than a name change...The food justice frame highlights the focus on systemic change and the

> necessity for engaging in political and policy processes as well as consciously addressing issues of movement mobilization and strategies (Wekerle 2004:379).

Alkon and Norgaard (2009) remark on the ability of food justice to serve as a theoretical and political bridge between existing scholarship on sustainable agriculture, food insecurity and environmental justice (p. 289). Indeed, the food justice frame shares crucial elements with environmental justice approaches, which bring attention to the ways in which impoverished communities and communities of color disproportionately experience environmental burdens such as pollution and environmental degradation, or in this case, restricted access to food. Alkon and Norgaard (2009) argue along with Allen (2004), that the 'justice' component of sustainability has often been ignored by proponents of sustainable agriculture. Similarly, as noted by Brahm Ahmadi, an activist with People's Grocery in Oakland, "most definitions of food security fail to articulate an analysis of power or to place the concern for human rights and social justice at the center of their analysis" (Ahmadi 2007). And yet, if food insecurity is not the result of a lack of food, but rather a lack of access to food caused by various inequalities across scales, then attention to these inequalities is essential to effect change. The position of the People's Grocery is that "in order to discuss issues of hunger, one must also discuss the underlining issues of racial and class disparity and the inequities in the food system that correlate to inequities in economic and political power" (Ahmadi 2007). While the Community Food Security definition above touches on some of these issues, Ahmadi maintains his critique, arguing that the pivotal role of social and economic inequities in food insecurity is not sufficiently centralized therein. Instead, People's Grocery advocates an approach where social justice is the central focus of advocacy rather than one of

many possible organizational outcomes. Thus, according to People's Grocery,

> Food justice asserts that no one should live without enough food because of economic constraints or social inequalities. Food justice reframes the lack of healthy food sources in poor communities as a human rights issue. Food justice also draws off of historical grassroots movements and organizing traditions such as those developed by the civil rights movement and the environmental justice movement. The food justice movement is a different approach to a community's needs that seeks to truly advance self reliance and social justice by placing communities in leadership of their own solutions and providing them with the tools to address the disparities within our food systems and within society at large (Ahmadi 2007).

Alkon and Norgaard (2009) share a similar perspective on food justice, although they link food insecurity specifically to institutionalized racism and racialized geographies, as with other environmental justice approaches. On a broader level however, they argue that the food justice framework links food access to wider questions of power and political efficacy (Alkon and Norgaard 2009:300). The assumption among many alternative agrifood advocates is that such initiatives are open to anyone, and that participation is a matter of choice. However, these authors argue that "access to healthy food is shaped not only by economic ability to purchase it, but also by historical processes through which race has come to affect who lives where and has access to what services," and so food justice in this context can serve to highlight the race and class privilege invisibilized by most alternative agrifood projects (Ibid).

In short, the concept of food justice situates the politics of food systems within larger mechanisms of inequality such as racism, classism and sexism, and attends to the effects of these inequalities across spatial scales. This perspective can thus help to prevent the reification of systems of inequality within alternative agrifood networks and at broader levels through recognition of the fact that while "food insecurity may manifest at the local level, [it is] rooted in larger, often global political economic structures" (Allen 1999:121). However, as Rachel Slocum (2006) notes,

> This view of the big picture—absent an understanding of the intersections of race, class and gender—represents a more general limitation of the anti-corporate, environmentalist and local empowerment movements. Without attention to social relations, community food and similar movements will remain limited in scope no matter how welcoming or inclusive they aim to be" (P. 343)

Indeed, Patel (2007) remarks on the need to attend to the social relations in food systems that determine the frame within which they operate. He states, "there is nothing natural about farming. It is a tangle of different social relations, of intervention and displacement in complex social and environmental webs" (Patel 2007:203). Recognition and rejection of the power imbalances in these relations may help us choose a better, more just way forward. Thus, the food justice framework is critical to building a more sustainable and just food system. It is to the social relations in various alternative agrifood initiatives that I now turn.

Comments on general power/privilege dynamics within the alternative agrifood movement

As mentioned earlier, the assumption that everyone can participate in alternative agrifood initiatives, let alone equally, is an illusion (Allen 1999). For example, Allen (1999) remarks that people's voices are mediated by cultural power relations, while Slocum (2007) discusses various ways in which alternative food knowledge and shopping capacity are classed and raced. Further, an emphasis on specifically localized efforts can be problematic for those traditionally marginalized, as local politics are not enough to overcome the imbalances in power that engender material inequality (Allen 2004:121). Indeed Allen (1999) notes how the concept of a localized 'community' is idealized and reified rather than seen as "a contingent and ideological construction that provides opportunities for some and constrains those for others" (p. 120). In order to move toward a more just food system, Allen (2004) calls for reflection on the embedded assumptions and ideological formations in agrifood movements that may prove problematic. I will discuss two of them here.

To begin with, Allen (1999, 2004) discusses agrarian ideology, noting that while it resonates with the ideology of many agrifood projects, it also contains within it elements of racism and sexism. For example, agriculture in the U.S. required the extermination and displacement of indigenous peoples, as well as the enslavement of people of color. Allen (2004) goes on to note that a white fear of retribution and a general lack of people of color in most rural communities contributed to intolerance and scapegoating of people of color (p. 122). In most cases, alternative agrifood initiatives fail to acknowledge this history.

There are also issues embedded in ideologies of individualism and self-reliance, which focus agency at the

individual level, detracting attention from systemic problems and the need for fundamental change, and contributing to "blaming the victim" (Allen 2004). Further, such an emphasis on individualism obscures the extent to which individual choice is circumscribed by our circumstances and forces of which we may be unaware (Patel 2007). Allen (2004) remarks for example that "desperate economic need is a form of coercion, not choice" (p. 125). Similarly, Patel (2007) notes that "where we live and work shapes what and how we eat and drink" (p. 266). For example, people of color and the poor have systematically less access to affordable healthy food than wealthier whites (Patel 2007; Shields 1995). And yet, obesity is commonly seen as a personal failing, rather than a result of "a systemic lack of control over our spaces and lives" (Patel 2007:273).

Julie Guthman (2008) argues that justice on these issues can only be achieved through substantial participation in defining the terms of engagement. Or as Allen (2004) put it, people don't just want to be included in an existing framework, they want to be full participants in creating that framework (p. 163). Numerous other authors have also called for participatory democratic engagement in earnest but as Allen (2004) notes people cannot have a voice if they are not a part of the discussion. Not only do imbalances of power lend unequal weight and validity to different voices, but it is often the most disadvantaged and impoverished that face barriers to participating in social movements altogether, as they are stretched thin trying to make ends meet and may not have the time or resources to contribute to such efforts (Allen 2004:162). As it stands, participants in the alternative agrifood movement are disproportionately white and affluent, and the movement needs to examine its hidden assumptions and power imbalances if it is to create more truly inclusive and sustainable food systems (Allen 2004; Slocum 2006).

The food system is a locus of intersection for many issues, including race, class and gender relations. Rachel Slocum (2006) notes how these relations "intertwine in the food system in different places that have different histories of racialization, gender relations and class struggle" (p. 339). Such dynamics interact in various ways to configure the position of individuals in the food system and cannot be effectively understood without reference to one another. In the pages that follow, I will discuss some specific examples of dynamics linked with class, race, and gender relations in alternative agrifood initiatives and their implications for food justice.

Class issues in alternative agrifood

As noted earlier, not everyone is able to participate in alternative agrifood initiatives to the same extent, and one major limiting factor is socioeconomic status. And yet, Hinrichs and Kremer (2002) echo Patricia Allen in reflecting on ideological constructions that shape participation in these initiatives, noting that the "national ideology of unobstructed economic opportunity and social mobility works against acknowledging that class might structure different social experience and outcomes" (p. 69). Transportation is a prime example, as access to a vehicle or reliable public transportation is often necessary for participation in alternative agrifood initiatives. As another example, Guthman et al. (2006) illustrate how many consumers depend on cheap food to make ends meet, yet proponents of the movement argue that food should not be cheap but instead should reflect real costs of production. However, without public support such as subsidies for more agroecological production, they argue that the 'real cost' is put on consumers, effectively limiting the ability of low-income people to participate in such initiatives. When the options are either a single, hand-

picked, organic ear of corn for a dollar at the local farmers market, or many ears of conventionally-grown corn for a dollar at the grocery store, there is no real "choice" for people whose food budgets are severely restricted. Fred Magdoff (2008) notes that poor people in the U.S. tend to first pay their rent and utilities, leaving food as one of the few "flexible" budget items (p. 7). As a result, people often rely on the emergency food system to meet their basic needs, including food pantries and soup kitchens, but these are operating at maximum capacity with fewer and fewer resources as funding support is cut (Magdoff 2008; Berg 2008). Given this context, it seems unconscionable that the alternative agrifood movement is not more inclusive.

This is not to say that efforts are not made within the movement to address the needs of low-income people. Indeed, many alternative agrifood projects donate produce to the emergency food system through gleaning programs and other similar efforts. Many farmers markets accept EBT (Electronic Benefit Transfer, formerly known as Food Stamps) and WIC coupons instead of cash. In addition, some Community Supported Agriculture initiatives (CSAs) even offer subsidized shares for low-income participants, or payment plans for those unable to pay a lump sum up front. However, due to financial structure of CSAs in which members pay in advance for a share of the crop harvest, some CSAs have been unable to accept EBT as members are legally considered to be speculating on the crop rather than buying food, although this is changing (Allen 1999). In addition, new marketing models are taking root such as the sliding scale price list at City Slicker Farms' produce stand in Oakland, where customers choose their price level based on what they can afford (McClintock 2008).

Despite these well-intentioned efforts to make alternative agrifood projects more socially inclusive, Hinrichs and Kremer (2002) note how most alternative

agriculture markets operate in ways that privilege elite interests over those of the poor (p. 67). Indeed, Allen et al. (2003) argue that class issues are underrepresented in the concerns of most alternative food movement leaders in California. For these leaders, "changing the food system means increasing the diversity of alternative markets such that consumers have more choice, rather than making deep structural changes that could reconfigure who gets to make which kinds of food choices" (Allen et al. 2003:72).

For example, Guthman et al. (2006) study the perceptions of CSA and farmers market managers regarding the participation of low-income people in such initiatives, finding the common perception among managers that low-income people do not participate because they're less educated, and less concerned about food quality and health than they "should" be. Managers tend to view participation as a matter of personal choice, resulting from different values and priorities, rather than from larger structures of inequality that constrain choices. In addition, the study found a class bias among managers who were concerned that the inclusion of low-income people might discourage the high-end customers such markets target, which Guthman et al. (2006) argue belies a deeper reluctance to weigh the needs of farmers and low-income people equally. In light of findings such as these, Hinrichs and Kremer (2002) argue that "to achieve substantive social inclusion, projects need to work explicitly on developing the resources and capacities of specific disadvantaged groups and individuals within the community so they can participate pro-actively and effectively *on their own terms* (p. 68, my emphasis).

Dynamics of race in alternative agrifood

Alkon and Norgaard (2009) argue that many black and indigenous communities are prevented from acquiring the

quality of food they once produced due to contemporary racialized geographies that restrict geographic and economic access to such food. Further, Guthman (2008a) argues that within alternative agrifood projects, dominant discourse calls on a white subject and codes its spaces as white, which has a "chilling" effect on people of color and acts as an exclusionary practice within the alternative agrifood movement (p. 388). Thus, Rachel Slocum (2007) states that the desire for good food and thriving economies is not white, but that it becomes white through the actions of white bodies that create whitened cultural spaces (p. 521). Yet instead of addressing structural inequalities and racialized discourses embedded in alternative food projects, efforts to include traditionally marginalized populations tend to focus on food itself with programs directed toward donations, growing and selling produce in food deserts, and educating residents about their food choices (Guthman 2008b). In a survey of a number of alternative agrifood initiatives in California, Allen et al. (2003) note how these initiatives as a whole, many of which once included civil rights interests in their work, "withdrew from direct opposition to powerful political and economic structures" as dominant social discourse shifted from a focus on civil rights to "neo-liberal arguments about individual responsibility" (p. 68). As a result, they found that market-based and entrepreneurial approaches were far more common than a focus on structural change and advocating entitlements (Allen et al. 2003). Indeed, Slocum (2006) and Allen et al. (2003) have remarked on the tendency for the alternative agrifood movement to emphasize access to food and education about food choices rather than confronting deeper issues of rights and power, which has serious implications for the inclusivity and future viability of the movement.

Guthman (2007) observes that a marker of whiteness is its own invisibility, and remarks on the subtle and

unconscious ways that whiteness shapes social relations in alternative food practice (p. 434). In this vein, Slocum (2006) notes that many community food organizations are unaware of or do not attend to the way that racism works in the food system and alternative food movement, including the dichotomy between white staff and leadership and those who experience food insecurity who are disproportionately lower income and people of color (p. 330). Instead, the whiteness of the movement is "seen as a diversity problem rather than as a relational process embedded in society" (Slocum 2006:331). However, both Guthman (2008a) and Slocum (2006) argue that the issue is not rectified by the mere presence of people of color. Guthman (2008a) argues that no space is race neutral, and so the concern lies in how spaces are coded to create discomfort and exclusion (p. 389). To give a basic example, Slocum (2007) points out how farmers at a given market sell cilantro without roots, catering to a particular clientele, whereas Indian or Thai cooks would expect to buy cilantro with its roots intact. In this way the market reflects particular cultural assumptions and desires.

Many alternative food proponents see the spaces in which they work as being 'colorblind,' that is, having no racial distinctions, but Guthman (2008a) notes how such colorblindness, rather than being non-racist, instead invisibilizes white privilege and reiterates the whiteness of alternative food spaces. Like Allen et al. (2003) suggest, Guthman interrogates the discourses backing ideological formations of alternative agrifood practice that reflect its white history, including common turns of phrase such as 'paying the full cost,' and 'getting your hands dirty in the soil' (Guthman 2008a:393). These expressions obscure the history of white privilege in U.S. agricultural land and labor relations (Guthman 2008a; 2008b). Indeed, even the aesthetic of alternative food practice is raced, insensitive to "a social history where many African Americans came to

prefer the anonymous supermarkets because they were not a site of racist practices" (Guthman 2008b:436).

The perceptions of leaders within the alternative agrifood movement, regarding participation by people of color, as with low income people, also serves as an exclusionary element in alternative agrifood practice. As with issues of class, participation was attributed to lifestyle choices, education, concern for food quality and having more time (Guthman 2008a). In contrast, Guthman (2008a) argues that lower rates of participation are likely attributable to exclusionary practices including white privilege, lack of cultural competency and the pervasive use of the idioms described above (p. 394). Again it becomes clear that within alternative food discourse the emphasis is placed on individual agency rather than systemic factors in concerns about participation.

This difference in perceptions regarding participation in alternative food projects is partly rooted in universalism, "the assumption that values held primarily by whites are normal and widely shared" (Guthman 2008a:391). Guthman argues that such a perspective obscures the experiences, aesthetics and ideals of others, marginalizing those who do not conform. Further, universalism fosters the belief that people who do not subscribe to common ideals don't know any better and need to be educated, leading to what Guthman (2008a) calls the "missionary impulse" that "works to re-inscribe difference" (p. 391). Indeed, many food advocates see a lack of knowledge as the main barrier to sustainable food systems, failing to recognize that current activism "reflects white desires more than those of the communities they supposedly serve" (Guthman 2008a; 2008b:431). For example, Guthman (2008b) recounts an experience of one of her students working in a community garden with youth of color who were compelled to 'volunteer' there. Guthman's student found that the youth resented having to

work without compensation for a white farmer, when they just wanted a Safeway in their neighborhood like everyone else (p. 440). However, since most alternative agrifood projects are constructed as white spaces, "whites continue to define the rhetoric, spaces and broader projects of agrifood transformation" (Guthman 2008a:395).

In order to counteract these circumstances Guthman (2008b) argues that the focus of food activism should move from food itself to attend to the power imbalances and structural inequalities shaping differences in access to food. Efforts to address structural problems could include the elimination of redlining, promoting living wages, expanding entitlement programs and working to improve the quality of the mainstream food supply rather than solely focusing on alternatives (Guthman 2008b:443). Attention should also be given to the ways in which whiteness obscures alternative, potentially more anti-racist food politics (Guthman 2008b:443). Rachel Slocum (2006) similarly argues that the failure of white liberals to recognize the existence and prevalence of racism poses a significant barrier to antiracist alliances in alternative food projects (p. 341). She advocates for heterogeneity and the celebration of differences rather than homogenizing consensus and articulates an antiracist practice that shifts the power balance toward historically oppressed communities to identify problems and leadership solutions (Slocum 2006:340). To do so, Slocum argues, requires analyzing oppression in the food system, and asking such questions as "who will take control?", "who is building power?", and "do the solutions we are developing speak to the issues that low-income communities and communities of color have identified as crucial?" (Slocum 2006:340-41). Similarly, Why Hunger, an organization addressing hunger and poverty, puts forth on its website an assessment list of items that organizations should consider in determining how best to move forward in developing anti-racist practices.

The topics include but are not limited to: the organization's structure, policies and procedures; power, accountability and decision-making practices; fundraising and budget—where does the money come from and who understands where the money is going; who does the organization feel most accountable to; accountability to target community; and understanding how the organization's work is linked to racism, among others items (Why Hunger 2008). Still, alternative agrifood initiatives largely struggle on the issue of racial inclusivity, with no broad agreement on what anti-racist politics looks like. However as Guthman (2008b) points out, shifting the balance of power requires that white advocates watch and listen rather than lead, and sometimes calls for the absence of white participation altogether (Guthman 2008b).

Gender dynamics in alternative agrifood

A number of authors have recognized a special relationship that women throughout the world have with food as both a symbol and an important basic need. Vandana Shiva (2005) describes how women have been the primary producers in subsistence economies, the providers of food, water, health and social security (p. 130). Carole Counihan (1998) remarks that women have "universal responsibility" for food preparation and consumption, and often for its production and distribution as well (p. 102). Penny Van Esterik (1999) takes this point further and states "it is women's knowledge of food that prevents starvation at the individual and household level," arguing that women's sense of self is often based on their ability to feed their family (p. 229).

Van Esterik (1999) thus argues that issues of hunger and food access must be understood from a gendered perspective as women and girls are more vulnerable to malnutrition. She goes on to note that women are most likely

to be responsible for feeding their families and mediating food at the individual, household and community level, while they are least likely to be involved in policy formation that shapes the food system and their access to it (Van Esterik 1999:231). Similarly, Allen (2004) remarks, "in every place in the world women are poorer, own less property, do more work, hold less power, are less educated and suffer more hunger than men. Since gender is such a determining factor in access to and control of resources, it follows that gender relations are crucial to shaping the prospects for a more sustainable future" (p. 153). Indeed, Van Esterik (1999) states, "food security cannot be realized until women are centrally included in policy discussions about food" (p. 225).

Within the alternative agrifood movement, some studies have found women to be better represented, while others have found them to be more marginalized (Allen 2004). In reflecting once again on the "glorified" ideological constructions embedded within alternative food such as agrarian values and the family farm, Allen (2004) notes how sustainable agriculture may reiterate gender-based differences in power and status without attending to the patriarchal privilege that underlies these constructions (p. 157). Further, such agrarian ideology has been central in the socialization of both women and men, particularly in rural communities, and so such power imbalances are deeply rooted.

Allen (2004) also comments on the extent to which the gendered division of labor in alternative food networks may disproportionately increase the amount of work for which women are responsible (p. 156). As Van Esterik (1999) notes, the relationship between women and food is culturally constructed, not a natural division of labor, and while most food work is constructed as women's work, it is often structurally invisible, and in addition to existing workloads (p. 225-26). For example, Allen (1999) points

out how participation in a CSA does not necessarily meet all the food needs of a family and may entail additional grocery shopping, as well as food preparation, processing and storage activities which, having been outsourced by the conventional food system, are once again placed within the home, the domain of women's labor (p. 125).

DeLind and Ferguson (1999) also examine gender relations in the alternative agrifood movement, asking if it could also be a women's movement, focusing on motivations for participation in a particular CSA. They found higher active participation rates among women in the CSA, although men and women attributed this to different factors. Men believed women's participation was due to their inherently more communicative and community-minded style, whereas women linked their participation to their "cultural default mode" roles of wife and mother (DeLind and Ferguson 1999:194). They stated that they needed to be flexible because their partners were not and yet their flexibility served to reiterate existing gender roles. Indeed, while women perceived the CSA as a locus of community and diversity, men's perceptions tended to focus on personal change and unified purpose (DeLind and Ferguson 1999). Despite such glaring differences between the views of women and men, DeLind and Ferguson (1999) comment on the fact that no one recognized the potential of the CSA to foster awareness of gender dynamics, arguing that participation did little to challenge existing social relations (p. 198).

Conclusion

As I have illustrated, alternative agrifood initiatives, while challenging the conventional corporate-industrial food system, still face significant obstacles in building truly just and sustainable food systems, not least because of their general failure to recognize the power-privilege relations

embedded within them that contribute to larger systems of inequality and structure inequitable access in the food system. There still remains a contradiction between the affordability of food and decent wages for farmers without public support (Allen 1999:125). Ironically, the industrial food system was effective at reducing class differences in food consumption, while alternative agrifood networks threaten to stratify consumption patterns once again along class lines (Allen 1999:126). Part of the issue is the emphasis on markets in building alternatives and achieving food security (Allen 1999). While markets can sometimes offer economic opportunities to mediate changes in funding and government support, they are unable to step in when people have nothing, as markets can only reflect the interests of those who can afford to participate in them (Allen 1999; Magdoff 2008:10). Thus, Allen (2004) argues that in the long run, market-oriented solutions are unlikely to be able to rectify issues rooted in fundamental social, economic and political inequities (p. 204).

If alternative agrifood movements are to "become new agents of change" working for food justice as Allen (2004) suggests, they need to make more explicit connections with social and environmental issues and include voices from all groups in the food system. Some movement advocates have already begun to make these connections. For example, to address the issue of affordability in alternative agrifood practice, organizations can look to economic empowerment programs such as the Right to Work Campaign discussed by Patel (2007). Rather than calling for cheap food for the poor, the Campaign advocates for the eradication of poverty so that everyone can afford to eat healthy food (Patel 2007:288). Indeed, such programs illustrate the links between rural and urban poverty when living wages for workers off the farm can support better prices and wages for farm workers. Further, these programs look to challenge structures of inequality at

larger scales, aligning with the food justice framework.

In this way, alternative agrifood initiatives can be seen as one possible locus of action, but they are by no means the only one. Allen (1999) notes that such initiatives cannot substitute for basic food distribution programs providing regular food access for those most in need (p. 126). In addition to participating in local community-based efforts and interrogating power-privilege relations at that level, action needs to be taken at larger political scales as well, by informing ourselves, holding our elected representatives accountable and advocating policy that helps to dismantle systems of inequality. It is critical that we attend to the ways we are complicit in international market dynamics, understanding how consumption patterns and policies advocated "on our behalf" or "in the national interest" affect not only our own available choices, but also those of people in other localities. Allen (2004) remarks that developing an environmentally sound and socially just agrifood system—in short, developing food justice—requires moving past existing race and class arrangements, arguing that future leadership of the movement will likely rest with people and communities who have traditionally been marginalized in food security and alternative agrifood discourse and practice (p. 211). Indeed, food justice seeks to empower communities to determine their own solutions and address inequities within the food system and society at multiple levels (Ahmadi 2007).

In this paper I have explored food justice as an organizing principle in alternative agrifood movement discourse and praxis, tracing its evolution through associated concepts such as food security, food sovereignty and the right to food. By situating the social relations of alternative agrifood initiatives within power-privilege dynamics and systems of inequality, I have shown how these initiatives are often raced, classed and gendered in ways that reiterate

existing inequalities and exclude people from participating. These dynamics pose significant challenges to the future viability of the movement, limiting its potential for positive and meaningful transformation. In moving forward, alternative agrifood advocates must attend to these dynamics of inequality and reach across disciplinary, institutional and social lines of difference to build a truly more inclusive and resilient movement.

ENDNOTES

[i] For specific examples of these principles in action, refer to the MST (Brazil's Landless Workers' Movement) and the work of Wendy Wolford, among others.

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