

Food Justice Research & Policy Paper

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Definition:

Following from longstanding racial and environmental justice (EJ) research and activism, “food justice seeks to ensure that the benefits and risks of where, what and how food is grown, produced, transported, distributed, accessed and eaten are shared fairly. Food justice (FJ) represents a transformation of the current food system, including but not limited to eliminating disparities and inequities” (Gottlieb and Joshi 2010). This includes issues often ignored by more privileged groups and movements in the food system, such as food worker rights, affordability of healthy, sustainably produced food, economic justice, the role of the military and the criminal justice system in maintaining racial and economic injustice, and specifically seeing these issues as deeply connected to the food system.

A central feature of the food justice movement is that it emphasizes the role of race in its critique of, and solutions to, problems in the food system (Allen 2010; Alkon and Agyeman 2011; Holt-Giménez and Wang 2011). The movement focuses on where food justice emerges, who articulates food justice and why groups demand justice (Cadieux and Slocum 2015; Gottlieb and Joshi 2010). Specifically, “FJ organizing prioritizes equitable distribution of resources and burdens, the rights of Indigenous, low-income communities and communities of color to a stake in decision-making and control of their food systems, and the dignity and economic rights of food chain workers (Bradley and Herrera 2015; Holt Giménez and Shattuck 2011)”. Racial equity, then, requires empowerment-based social change that directly confronts cultural, political and economic marginalization.” (Sbicca and Myers 2017) Gottlieb and Joshi (2010) note that food justice “remains a relatively unformed concept, subject to multiple interpretations” (p. 6). This in turn bears potential perils for discursive expressions of FJ, the practices of FJ activists, and the stated goals of FJ organizations (FJOs). (Sbicca 2012)

More broadly, EJ focuses on the disproportionate exposure of economically and racially marginalized people to environmental burdens (Alkon and Agyeman 2011; Park and Pellow 2004). EJ may be used by FJ activists as an overarching frame to emphasize the disproportionate lack of access to healthy foods. But as Gottlieb and Joshi (2010) contend, “the food justice argument brings together an array of arguments about food and environment, food and health, food and labor, food and hunger, and how food is grown, produced, accessed, and eaten, and situates them within a justice framework” (p. 230). This carries FJ’s concerns beyond the EJ frame on disproportionality and opens the possibility for a more radical critique of capitalism,

racism, and patriarchy built around food as an environmental benefit, while simultaneously proposing a set of alternatives that may build economically viable and just agrifood systems. (Sbicca 2012)

Approaches to Food Justice:

A food justice lens focuses on root causes, transformational change, and promotes systemic solutions rooted in equity. Taking from energy justice (McCauley et al. 2013), food justice should also be rooted in tenets of:

- **Distributional justice:** Focuses on land, resources, labour, and ecological systems more generally. Currently, the distribution of the benefits and ills of our food system are significantly unequal. FJ calls for fair distribution of benefits for all members of society regardless of income, race, etc alongside the dismantling of environmental ills.
- **Procedural justice:** Demands equitable procedures that engages those most affected by a project/process/action in a meaningful and ongoing way. A central component of both food justice and food sovereignty is community decision-making power over food systems.
- **Recognition justice:** Recognition justice is more than tolerance, and states that individuals must be fairly represented, that they must be free from physical threats and that they must be offered complete and equal political rights. But, some argue that recognition may often not go far enough. Especially concerning Indigenous sovereignty, rooting justice in the politics of recognition assumes a set of powers onto the settler colonial state, and relies on this state formation to acknowledge and uphold Indigenous sovereignty and rights (Coulthard 2014). Therefore, Indigenous resurgence combined with settler reckoning may be a better means to envision ‘recognition justice’ moving forward.

In the Canadian context, issues of food justice must be placed within a broader structure and understanding of settler colonialism, as settler colonialism is the foundation upon which land and food systems have evolved (Rotz 2017). Settler colonialism should be understood as a structure and not an event, whose patterns and logics are sustained today, and done so to maintain white settler (social, cultural, and material) domination (Wolfe, 2006). Achille Mbembe identifies three kinds of violence upon which colonial sovereignty relies: “the founding violence of conquest; the legitimating violence of transforming conquest into moral authority; and the ordinary and banal violence necessary for the maintenance of colonial sovereignty.” (via Thobani 2007, 38). European claims to Turtle Island relied primarily on land dispossession which necessitated longstanding logics of Indigenous dehumanization, wherein Indigenous people were perceived as “doomed to extinction by history and progress” (Thobani 2007, 41) The defining ‘here to stay-ness’ of settler colonialism specifically is foundational to the formation of Canada. To make

Turtle Island ‘home’, settlers must destroy and erase the Indigenous peoples who live here while simultaneously reifying settler culture and order (Tuck and Yang 2012).

Concerning food specifically, the settler colonial government (the same government posed to establish a national food policy) continues to suppress Indigenous agrarianism and other forms of food gathering (Kepkiewicz and Rotz, forthcoming). Since European contact, nearly all forms of Indigenous food growing, gathering, and trading have been banned (Carter, 1990). Meanwhile, Indigenous peoples have been prohibited from practicing colonial forms of farming and have been restricted from accessing the land and resources it requires, which, together with resource exploitation and legislated famine, amounted to a “state-sponsored attack on indigenous communities” (Carter, 1990; Daschuk, 2013, p. 114). At the same time, Indigenous land dispossession allowed for the white, male-centered system of “conventional” agriculture to be established—land that was not the Crown’s to give away to white-European immigrants in the first place (Kepkiewicz and Rotz, forthcoming). Together with colonial institutions, policies and discourses that constructed Indigenous peoples as immigrants and outsiders who must “adopt dominant middle-class Canadian social and moral codes and pro-capitalist values”, these forces aimed to eradicate Indigenous peoples and transcend colonialism by naturalizing white male settlers as “Indigenous”, exalted national subjects (Bohaker & Iacovetta, 2009, p. 427; Thobani, 2000, 2007). Meanwhile, Canada has concurrently been built on a system of racial hierarchy more broadly, which is expressed clearly through our immigration system and the longstanding exploitation of racialized immigrant labour. In fact, the use of racialized migrant workers to “achieve labor market flexibility has emerged as a central aspect of accumulation in the contemporary economy” (Preibisch 2007, 421). Concerning food provisioning specifically, racialized labour exploitation manifests acutely through the Seasonal Agricultural Workers Program (SAWP). Current research “identifies the SAWP as a legally sanctioned form of labor unfreedom”, because the worker is only authorized to provide labour to the assigned employer. This eliminates employee labour mobility, leaving them subject to control by the employer (Preibisch 2007; Basok et al. 2013; Reid-musson 2017). Furthermore, SAWP workers have no formal route to permanent residency.

A central issue concerning FJ in practice is that, as it has increasingly been adopted in U.S. food movements, it has become fused or conflated with—and even dissolved under—more institutionally legitimized concepts of food access, security and local food. Specifically, more common, or mainstream food movements in the U.S. and Canada—such as local food movements, farmers markets, food banks, and food access initiatives more broadly—often have an optimistically reformist view of the state, wherein they see public health and government-led agri-food, and environmental programs as central to the goal of food security. A central concern being that these food movements are commonly led by white and/or economically privileged identities. It is not surprising then that those with privilege would view the state as an ally, or at

least as capable of, and essential to supporting sustainable food systems of ‘all’. This is a rather different model than is being adopted by FJ movements across Latin America and Asia. This includes movements such as La Via Campesina and the Zapatista movement. In turn, Cadieux and Slocum (2015) argue that comparatively reformist models (centred on food access and security) do not necessarily qualify as food justice or sovereignty. In fact, scholars and practitioners contend that these movements rarely address FJ issues meaningfully in their work.

To clarify, the concern is that those working at the helms of alternative food movements are often more racially and economically privileged. In turn, these identities do not necessarily pay adequate attention to strengthening intersections of racial and economic justice in food systems. As a result, many argue that the movement continues to work within state and market mechanisms despite the consistent failure of these mechanisms to address the underlying causes and concerns of those most marginalized in the food system. As Cadieux and Slocum (2015) state, “it's great to start and go to farmers markets and do urban farming, but don't get too caught up in creating an alternative system because you leave the people who are most harmed by [...] the conventional food system behind. Starting a farm doesn't do anything for farm workers, for instance. Starting a farmers market doesn't change the family farmers who are too big to sell at the farmers market but may be too small to sell to a Safeway. So being conscious that in creating alternatives, don't forget to do the hard, really, really hard long work of reforming and lifting the people who are most harmed in the conventional system” (pg. 9). With the expanding use of the term food justice, many argue that scholars and practitioners need to more rigorously examine what actually counts as food justice, and how their work actually furthers justice in the food system. A central question here is whether all food access and charity initiatives count as justice, or do they instead take our collective attention away from larger political forces?

Moving FJ Forward:

The following is a list of possible questions that are central to consider in order to dismantle injustices in our food system (adapted from: Food Secure Canada 2014):

- Who grows and gathers food?
- Who has access to land and the means of production?
- Who has access to healthy, nutritious, culturally appropriate food and who doesn't?
- Who suffers environmental injustice and how does it manifest?
- Who makes food related decisions?
- How does colonialism affect our food system and traditional livelihoods?
- What types of foods are produced?
- What kinds of knowledge is valued and which isn't?

Some food-based tactical repertoires revolve around social justice by securing such rights and entitlements (Hassanein 2003), while others focus on developing local, autonomous economic strategies based on communities' cultural practices and collective skills (Sbicca 2012; Mares and Pena 2011). However, ideologies that posit strategic goals of social justice and autonomy may at times conflict. Given that the food justice movement has multiple ideological influences and is a relatively young social movement, a food justice organization provides a very insightful case study to better understand the opportunities and perils of seeking a cohesive frame for FJ.

Models & Solutions:

Pragmatically speaking, FJ approaches seek solutions from communities most affected by food inequities, a few common community needs/desires include sustainable community programming to “promote the availability and affordability of fresh and locally grown foods”, government policies “to ensure affordable pricing of nutritious food for all, regardless of where people live”, and an increase in provincial income and minimum wage so that people can afford to maintain a healthy diet (Black Creek Food Justice Network 2016).

From a food justice perspective, process and governance is central to alleviating inequities in the food system. Indeed, those most affected by the food system must direct the solutions that work for them and their communities. In turn, the following are important questions to consider when evaluating governance and policy processes: *how are different actors structurally relating to one another, how is power distributed, who is around the table and at what point in the process were they 'called' to the table, who is defining the problems/solutions, who is defining/directing the process, is engagement ongoing and meaningful or intermittent and fragmented?*

Moreover, in the context of settler colonialism, how do we work in ways that respect nation-to-nation relationships on Turtle Island? It is also crucial to acknowledge the difference between equality and equity within the process itself. In doing so, one ought to acknowledge that different groups have not had equal voice and power in decision-making processes. Therefore, ‘civil society’ and ‘private sector’ should not be equally consulted. First, organized, corporate interests have long had greater lobbying power, which has allowed them to heavily dictate the direction of our food system. As a result, efforts to ‘rebalance’ public and private influence do not go far enough. Second, there are many diverse voices, groups, and interests that become conflated within the terminology of ‘civil society’ and ‘public’. Identities and communities that are continually marginalized ought to have greater power and space throughout the entire policy process. Finally, marginalized identities cannot be lumped together. The ways in which injustice plays out differ according to specific intersections and circumstances of identities, and each has their own set of strategies that can be instructive.

From a food justice lens, the solutions are in the communities, and are context specific. Therefore, big policy ‘solutions’ should be defined by those most affected, while ensuring communities are supported to create the solutions that work for them. E.g. solutions will likely look quite different in Thunder Bay, Timmins, Six Nations, Owen Sound, Guelph, or Sarnia. The point being, those most marginalized should be prioritized when discussing food system solutions, and such discussions should focus on localized communities concurrent with communities of identity. Additionally, within the structure of settler colonialism in Canada, alternative modes of governance must be considered, and such consideration should specifically include the role of land repatriation. Such efforts ought to thus prioritize shifts toward Indigenous governance structures. Of course, Indigenous governance structures are not monolithic, and differ based on the nation/community and their specific relation to their lands and water. In effect, these processes, and their relationship to settler institutions and authorities, are for Indigenous nations/communities to direct and determine for themselves.

Indeed, decolonization is not about Indigenous inclusion, voice or involvement in settler spaces (Coulthard 2014; Byrd 2011; Lawrence and Dua 2005). Instead, decolonization is grounded in Indigenous resurgence together with settler reckoning (Wildcat et al., 2014). Wildcat et al. argue, “if colonization is fundamentally about dispossessing Indigenous peoples from land, decolonization must involve forms of education that reconnect Indigenous peoples to land and the social relations, knowledges and languages that arise from the land” alongside strategies for land repatriation (2014, I). As a result of Indigenous cultural and political resurgence and movement building, “settler society would be forced into reckoning with its colonial past and present and undertake in its own decolonizing journey.” (Wildcat et al. 2014, IV).

Scales of organizing and action: There is broad consensus that a Food Justice approach prioritizes the needs, interests, and actions of local communities. Even national-scale organizations, such as Food Secure Canada focus their support at the local and/or community scale: “By working in collaboration with local actors from a wide-range of fields, we will conduct an assessment of local food systems and identify how structural racism manifests itself at different levels. This exercise is a rare opportunity to produce a comprehensive look at our very complex food systems. We hope to do the first assessments in Halifax as a pilot project with preliminary results being presented at our Assembly this November.” (Food Secure Canada 2014)

Scope/timeframe: Engagement and participation should be ongoing. This could look like a long-term council or working group that provides consistent support that works with communities.

Some interesting models negotiating FJ directly include the Peoples Grocery (PG) (Sbicca 2012), which uses an anti-oppression ideology to actualize FJ, and FoodShare Toronto’s Cross-cultural Food Access Innovation Hub.

For instance, Food Share Toronto aims to ground food justice in all of their work. With the following listed priorities[1]:

- Partnering with communities and trusteeing grassroots groups who experience the most food insecurity and multiple forms of oppression, particularly Indigenous, Black, and racialized communities;
- Recognizing and supporting the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and the Truth and Reconciliation Calls to Action, applying both to our work;
- Opening up conversation with our long-term partners and funders, to ensure they are implementing their own anti-oppression frameworks;
- Applying a critical equity lens to our program design and delivery;
- Embedding food justice in all our work which includes training all staff and board members on anti-racism and the ways oppression is manifested in our food system.

Concerning process specifically, Food Secure Canada and the BC Food Systems Network (BCFSN) have both done a fairly good job at prioritizing the development of participatory governance structures and the participation of diverse voices (Levkoe et al. 2012). This is notable given the greater scale and scope of these organizations. Indeed, enacting participatory structures is often more achievable at a local scale.

For the BCFSN, they focused on building a network at the outset, which has led to a “high degree of connectivity” and a “low degree of centralization” both within the organization and across the network (Levkoe et al. 2012). As the BCFSN chair, Dayna Chapman notes, “the BCFSN lacked the capacity to support the hundreds of small projects around the province”, in turn, they “decided to put energy and resources into the development of bioregional networks” (Levkoe et al. 2012). The BCFSN has also built space to prioritize Indigenous voices and perspectives, specifically through their establishment of the Working Group on Indigenous Food Sovereignty (WGIFS). The ongoing nature and function of the WGIFS has helped to develop more long-term, meaningful relationships between settler and Indigenous scholars, activists, and communities.

As well, we can look to Food Secure Canada's First Principles Protocol for Building Cross-Cultural Relationships (FPP), which emphasizes the centrality of establishing principles for "guid[ing] the work of individuals and organizations involved in the People's Food Policy Project" (2010). These principles intend to build a process – a way for people to work together and build relationships. This protocol is a "living document" with "the possibility for continued revisions, demonstrating the importance of figuring out how we will relate to one another before even beginning to speak about policy" (Kepkiewicz & Rotz, forthcoming).

FJ work ranges in scale and scope, from grassroots organizing and programming, to policy development, advocacy and activism. Slocum and Cadieux (2015) identify 4 broad areas through which food justice organizing and action may occur:

1. Acknowledging and confronting historical, collective social trauma and persistent race, gender, and class inequalities. This includes (but is certainly not limited to) the extensive work being done by Public Interest Research Groups (PIRG's) across Ontario, Black Lives Matter, Idle No More, No One is Illegal, and various grassroots and community-based organizers and groups such as Aamjiwnaang and Sarnia Pipelines, Chippewas of the Thames First Nation Against Line 9, and local Truth and Reconciliation Working Groups.

2. Designing exchange mechanisms that build communal reliance and control. Most obviously, this includes various co-operative and community supported networks and models. Food and agricultural exchange co-ops include models across the food system (from production to retail). Specific CSA's can be found through the CSA directory (<http://csafarms.ca/CSA%20map.html>) (EFAO, Ontario Natural Food Co-op, West-End Food Co-op, the Peoples Grocery, Community Food Centres, etc.). That said, it is still unclear about the extent to which CSA's and co-ops are able to address socio-economic inequalities in food and land access, especially concerning marginalized groups. Instead, collective models such as the Detroit Food Justice Task Force, Soul Fire Farm, and the Growing Food & Justice for all Initiative—which are committed to ending racism and injustice in the food system—may offer more meaningful alternatives to traditional co-ops.

3. Creating innovative ways to control, use, share, own, manage and conceive of land, and ecologies in general, that place them outside the speculative market and the rationale of extraction. This may include Land Trusts (see the Ontario Farmland Trust and the Parkdale Community Land Trust) as well as co-operative and community-based farmland ownership models (Black Creek Community Farm and TRCA). In the Ontario context, much of this work is supported by organizations such as Food Secure Canada (FSC), the National Farmers Union (NFU), and the Ecological Farmers Association of Ontario (EFAO). At the local and regional scale, policy advocacy is led by food policy councils: see Toronto (Toronto Public Health 2015) and Thunder Bay (City of Thunder Bay 2014).

4. Pursuing labour relations that guarantee a minimum income and are neither alienating nor dependent on (unpaid) social reproduction by women. In Ontario, this includes the work of the Ontario Coalition Against Poverty (OCAP), FoodShare, Justicia for Migrant Workers and the ‘Harvesting Freedom’ campaign, as well as 15 and Fairness.

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[1] See <http://foodshare.net/about/food-justice/>