

Histories of Othering, Practices of Solidarity, and Prospects for Emancipatory Convergence Among California's Food and Farming Movements in Times of Resurgent Rightwing Power

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Since roughly the mid-2010s, rightwing politics have reappeared with force in various national arenas, laying out threats to social justice and ecological health on top of preexisting neoliberal-era social and ecological crises. This rise of the Right, and the consequences thereof, are tied to rural people, places, and processes, and agrarian politics in particular. Within this context and these links, those interested in progressive change that might push back against this rightwing surge have sought 'convergence' among various 'emancipatory' political movements: a stronger counter-hegemonic force through greater unity amidst movement diversity. Focusing on the case of California (where the author has spent decades engaged in food and farming movements), this research attends to the key role of 'Others' within the continuing interactive dynamic of rightwing and emancipatory politics. I look historically and at today's rural and agrarian 'Others' – those who have been Othered or marginalized by their social class positions – to answer my central research question: *How do agrarian and rural movements in California describe and manifest emancipatory politics, and in what ways and to what extent might these politics counter historical trajectories and current manifestations of rightwing politics?* Utilizing a qualitative, historical, and relational activist-scholar methodology, informed by critical realism and critiques of purely positivist science, the study gathered data through secondary historical literature reviews, document analysis, and interviews and participant observation with food, farming, agrarian, and rural constituencies: farmworker-focused community organizations, environmental justice and urban food justice activists, ecofarming initiatives, people of colour farmers, Indigenous organizers, and agroecology researchers.

The study finds that emancipatory food and farming movements in recent decades are increasingly radical (meaning critical of and seeking to overcome capitalism and the capitalist nation state), as the voices of people of colour have been more often heard and heeded, both in movements and in society at large. Although 'emancipation' means different and contradictory things across the movements I studied, this convergence towards radicality is notable and indicates shifts in societal conditions (particularly regarding race and racism). Solidarity in work across difference is challenged by race, economic class, gender, and other axes of marginalization and Othering, and different theories of change among movement groups and sectors, especially with regards to capitalism and the state. Multiple resulting tensions are navigated by movements, to varying degrees of conflict and synergy. Emancipatory food movements work against rightwing politics when strategies of 'assimilation' (uptake of mainstream values, goals, processes) and 'valorization' (defense and articulation of the values of being non-mainstream) used to counter Othering are complemented with efforts to create a larger 'we' across differences, while honoring those differences: a strategy of 'differencing'. In the contemporary moment of racial reckoning in US society, assimilation, valorization, and differencing efforts have brought about greater alignment between the traditionally white-led ecofarming sector and more people of colour-led sectors, leading to more radical rhetoric and practice. Taken together, the research conclusions suggest that if supported by sympathetic scholarship and the less-radical sectors of food movements and civil society, new radical food

movement directions may continue to develop as important beacons for emancipatory politics and barriers to rightwing political strength. An aspect of the new knowledge generated in this research is its emphasis on *non-state* movement elements and strategies. By conceptually unpacking and historicizing strategies against Othering and analyzing food movement theories of change – with analyses refracted through critical agrarian studies literatures and codeveloped by way of Black and Indigenous radical theories – I have concluded that non-state ideologies and actions are crucial to food movements' deepened impact, on their own terms, but also in terms of opposing the rise of rightwing politics.