A zine synopsis of the PhD dissertation:

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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Explanation of this zine

Hi! This is my dissertation-as-zine. I made it to share my research results with those who may not have the time or inclination to read a 400 page academic paper – that is, most normal people, and probably a good chunk of my friends and community. I also made this to share the results with those whose work informed my research (i.e. food movement activists), and to continue our dialogue about the debates that activist work raises.

Ok, first I should explain what a dissertation is – for those who might be unfamiliar. The technical explanation is that a PhD student spends 4+ years (sometimes up to 10 years!) defining a research question and a methodology of research methods (e.g. interviews, archival searching, data crunching) to answer that question, and then collecting enough data to answer it. Really, though, it is quite a silly exercise, considering what most PhD students will go on to do after they finish their degree. That is, very few PhD graduates in the social sciences go on to become (secure) academics themselves; and even if they do become academics, a big part of their job becomes to teach, which they have not received any training in, or very little. Also, only like 5 people will ever read your dissertation! What a great usage of energy and time!

Part of what is very specific about the (in my view narrow) academic exercise of a dissertation is the need to speak to particular "research gaps"; this indicates that the questions you're asking in your research – about the issues you are confronting – must be questions that are seen as *not having been covered*

adequately sufficiently or well enough in previous studies. I find this limiting in terms of the radical imagination necessary to create substantial political change through knowledge creation and diffusion. In part this is because things need to be said at different times or in new ways to different audiences, even if they have been said or dealt with before. Sometimes, even a change in perspective or an unorthodox or more creative approach to the same question or subject can be illuminating, but this sort of justification for a research project is discouraged by most PhD processes.

But enough about academia! For the purposes of this writing, I put these sorts of academic debates and considerations aside mostly, and instead focus on the content of the dissertation.

What is it about? Who is implicated? What should we do about it?

These are the sort of questions I hope to answer here, based on the dissertation's contents.

Introduction, or "why do the study?"

In fancy terms, this "why" is called the problematic. Or in French (since that's fancier and sounds cooler), the "problematique". This is essentially a justification for why this research is needed.[1] While you'd think things like ecological collapse from climate change, rising fascist government, extractive industries destroying Indigenous territories, etc are reasons enough to research in order to know how to combat them, academia (like I said) adds the need to frame and justify the research in terms of "the literature". How does your approach relate to existing theories and research?

My problematique is about the post-Trump-election moment, when so much media attention and public focus was on those who voted for Trump. Many liberals and mainstream people were taken by surprise by Trump's popularity and sudden win. "How could these people vote for such a [racist/sexist pig/insert negative description here]?!?" From this question emerged the soon-dominant interest in the "white working class", and why and how they had moved from Democratic to Republican parties. Supposed leftist pundits debated whether the white working class had been motivated to vote for this putrid character out of deep-seated racism or, more generously, "economic anxiety" from decades of neoliberal policy changes that made their livelihoods and lifestyles all the more precarious. The notion that Trump courted and was loved by "rural" people (imagine: cowboys, farmers, burley white men doing "real work") also lended

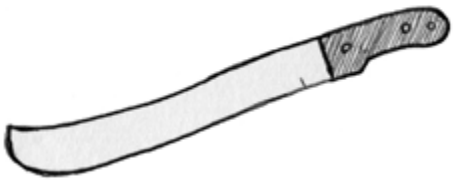
1 Side note: all social science is basically an exercise in justification. If you like justifying things, you might want to become a social scientist!

interest to scholarship on the white working class and rural and agricultural (aka 'agrarian') politics.

But this wasn't my jam. I was NOT so surprised by Trump's election. And I wasn't much interested in a political search for solving society's problems by appealing first and foremost to white people in the USA. Having followed racial politics my whole life, and being quite disinclined towards electoral politics (or the idea that national politics is where progressive political change emerges), I saw Trump and his rise as a *continuity* rather than *shift* from plenty of preexisting aspects of US politics and culture. Rather than focus on the white working class as his voters, I wanted to "flip the script" and look at the kinds of people who have long been *marginalized* in US politics at large, and in rural/agrarian worlds in particular. In particular this means people of color (POC). Looking more at these sectors of society, I proposed, is how we will find better answers about the kind of "authoritarian populism" that Trump represents (and which is reflected in political leaders around the world now, like Bolsonaro in Brazil, Erdogan in Turkey, Putin in Russia, etc). Plus, POC's long-standing struggles can provide lessons, tools, and inspirations in ongoing work to subvert the Trumps of the world and create a better world – especially in relation to food, agriculture, land use, etc (my personal area of interest).

Hence my research was to see where and how we can trace the origins of Trump-style politics in the USA, and to see how "emancipatory" politics have historically worked against this politics. In particular, recognizing the "Othering"[2] of POC and marginalized social groups as key to rightwing politics means taking seriously "Other" perspectives, and my research tried to unpack a bit more detail on Othering and its opposition by Others. In the end, of course, I'm most concerned with today, not the past. So the study is historically-informed but focuses on what today's movements think, believe, and do. My research question was:

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?



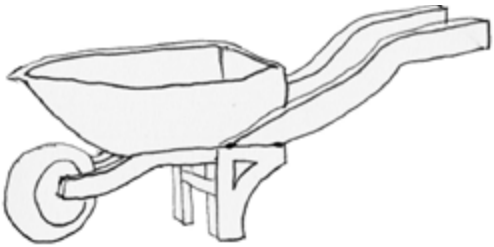
2 As defined by powell and Menendian (2016: 17) Othering is 'a set of dynamics, processes, and structures that engender marginality and persistent inequality across any of the full range of human differences based on group identities'. Othering can be overt and covert, explicit (e.g. Trump's demonization of Mexicans) and embedded in structures of action (like the policing of the US's southern border). It is a process of dehumanization of a category of human beings 'across any of the full range of human differences'.

Methodology: the "how" of the study

I'm not going to repeat here in depth, but in short I will explain how I conducted the research. My methods (the things I *actually did* to gather "data") included participant observation, interviews, document analysis, and shit tons of reading, writing, and thinking. And all these things were done repeatedly, so each step is more a re-consideration of previous steps in light of the new one. An interview sparks new reading, which sparks new theorizing, which influences another interview, and so on. Participant observation is maybe the most uncommon term to non-academics, and it basically means I spent time "observing" the stuff I was studying (food movements). Because I am an active participant in these things[3], this was easy enough to layer on top of my existing involvement. Of course, post-Covid this observation went largely online, which changed the research but I hope not enough to compromise its outcomes.

3 For example, meetings of the US Food Sovereignty Alliance, HEAL Food Alliance, and Celebrating Women's Leadership in Food.

An important thing to mention is my use of "agroecology encuentros" (or 'encounters') to get together hundreds of participants in food movements, across many lines of difference, and largely focused on POC participants and groups, as an activist-scholar methodology. These are like 'focus groups' used in a lot of research, but were more about generating interaction than just collecting 'data'. I started organizing these in 2017, actually before officially beginning the PhD, but I figured that I could use the platform of 'data collection' for the PhD project to commit my time to something I felt was useful anyway, as activism. I'd say they worked for both purposes. These four events held in the Bay Area and the Central Valley brought together especially movement folks from both places, to have dialogues about topics such as soil contamination, what the term agroecology means, what decolonization means for food systems in California, land access, capitalism, and more. Co-organized alongside local organizations where the events were held, these events also included collective work (at farm host sites) and farmer-to-farmer exchanges of practical knowledge. The "People's Agroecology Process" has been conducting these kinds of encounters since 2015, and has made a good booklet about how the process works, and why it's a great method for building out our movements.



My methodology also relied heavily on history, seeking to review California's agrarian history and what it could tell us about the back-and-forth of political struggles. Roughly, I looked at sources covering the post-Gold Rush period (mid-1800s) to the 21st century (~2000), but some of my sources like the book *The Dreamt Land* by Mark Arax (recommended!) go further back. This research looks at the contradictory forces duking it out while California became "California": capitalists versus laborers, Indigenous populations versus colonizers, different races pitted against each other, and so on. In particular, I looked at struggles of workers (mostly migrants) in the fields and food industry, of Indigenous people, and of people of color in rural contexts. In dealing with the 20th century, I also looked at some environmentalist-focused movement groups, which were multi-ethnic, and how these related to POC concerns. One, which I highly recommend looking into, is the "National Land for People" movement of the 1970s and 1980s in California, which nearly won legal/political battles with "Big Ag" to break up the huge landholdings of agribusiness in California's San Joaquin Valley.

Through the historical part of the research I described dynamics of both "Othering" and counter-Othering over this historical period, and (later in the dissertation) how these show up in the present. The histories also brought up the critical importance of strategies of control pursued by capitalists (owners, such as the 'growers' of California's mega-farms) and states/government forces. Some of their tactics held raw violence at their base: arresting, shooting, attacking union organizers, for example. Others include more subtle means of dividing the population like the use of citizenship laws as a way to keep certain people dominated

(particularly, migrant workers, who were pushed and pulled into exploited labor circumstances, but kept out of means of accessing citizenship rights). A lot of the techniques of rightwing power developed in this time involved roping in working class people (especially white people) to campaigns of hate and fear. This is an example of how powerful elites use "consent"-based strategies to change political conditions, in addition to the classic strategy of violence-based coercion. When we look at the "long twentieth century" and how agrarian California developed, we see the state regularly and repeatedly intervening on behalf of colonizing and capitalist elements in society, and we conclude that the state and capital (and colonization) form mutually-reinforcing aspects of the same general processes of marginalization of certain populations (particularly, those Othered in raced, classed, gendered, and ideological terms). This implication of state actions being at the core of Othering and injustice comes up again later on in the dissertation.

Assimilation, Valorization, and Differencing as strategies against Othering

Through this research, I came up with the notions of *assimilation*, *valorization*, and *differencing* as strategies to counter Othering. I'll briefly explain these here. Assimilation is probably the most known term, but I use it here to define an emancipatory strategy of attempted entry into the world of the mainstream in which one has been forced out (via Othering). Typically, assimilation is thought of in cultural terms: as abandoning attributes of one's culture in order to assimilate to a new culture. Although this is at play in the assimilation I describe here, it doesn't need to happen for assimilation to take place. I consider assimilation as *acts* that seek to improve one's conditions through the established structures, values, and processes of mainstream society (which has excluded one as an 'Other'). Usually, the main vehicles used for this are (a) economic improvement by way of land and resources access, entrepreneurship, and capitalist investment/profit, and (b) cultivating access to political power, up to and including by taking positions of political power in existing governmental bodies.

As I sort of indicate above, there are problems with assimilation as a strategy on its own: it can reinforce structures of power that reproduce (rather than challenge) inequalities at a larger level. Supporting the flawed and exclusive citizenship politics of voting reinforces our collective lack of democratic control over our own society (not to mention, domestic politics regularly distract US voters from their own complicity in ongoing US imperialism). Women voting certainly hasn't abolished the patriarchal nature of the state, and white women voters aren't

exactly vanguards of progressive politics (see for instance their high voting rates for Trump). On a more basic level, it's clear that people from marginalized and Othered backgrounds can lose their commitments to helping those groups once they achieve positions of power; a common refrain I've heard on "Black twitter" describes how "skinfolk ain't necessarily kinfolk", and this can be seen quite often in state politics. Assimilation to capitalist relations (e.g. the rapper Killer Mike's emphasis on business development among Black folks, mirrored in some 'food justice' efforts) can reinforce a false "bootstraps" narrative for POC groups to gain acceptance in mainstream society, while generating new divisions within the Black community (between business owners and workers), and problematically leaving capitalism unquestioned. US history is full of stories where poor, Othered, exploited immigrants became the next generation's leading farm and mine owners, labor exploiters, land despoilers, financiers of internal and external colonization. Some of those migrant groups who had the option even 'became white', leveraging assimilation to colonialism and capitalism in order to strengthen their own positions, while also strengthening existing structures of power.

However, this isn't to say that assimilation is wrong or useless. By gaining land, marginalized groups and individuals strengthen their position to *be political* in certain more threatening ways. We can think here of the Southern Black farmers whose farms hosted and overlapped with militants of the Civil Rights movement (see Monica White's book *Freedom Farmers* and Charles Cobb's *This Nonviolent Stuff'll Get You Killed*). Black people in the US have long sought liberation through self-reliance and entrepreneurship, including land access and farming – and this strategy has indeed

helped confront the white supremacist foundations of the social order. Increasing rights and access to political power can certainly blunt the worst negative effects of mainstream (white, male, wealthy) control of government. So let's think about assimilation strategies as potentially helpful, but also dangerous tools if not taken up thoughtfully.

In contrast, valorization is an emancipatory strategy of valorizing one's particular, different-from-the-mainstream contributions as a group or collective identity, arguing essentially that 'we (the Others) are valuable, *because of who we are, as we are*.' We can see how important this is for Othered groups to (re)assert their essential dignity and worth. The "Black Power" movement, and the American Indian Movement of the 1960s/70s, can be seen as absolutely crucial movements to valorize these distinct identities/social positions, on their own terms. I want us to recognize the ongoing importance of these processes, but also to be concerned for their limits and dangers. For one, when valorization goes "too far", it elevates one group over another and thus creates hierarchies of oppression, sometimes described in the phrase the "oppression olympics". This happened historically, as when Asian-Americans (who certainly have been on the receiving end of anti-Asian Othering for centuries) were marginalized and de-centered in radical Left movements in the 1970s Los Angeles in favor of the

"most oppressed" Black vanguard (see Laura Pulido's book *Black, Brown, Yellow and Left*), and it happens today. Secondly, valorization can go too far when it emphasizes certain traits (such as race) as more consequential to politics than others (such as class). Too-far valorization also appears in today's political discourses that describe particular vantage points ('woman', 'Black', 'disabled') as unknowable to others. When we make claims that this group cannot understand the marginalization of that group because of the absence of a particularly Othered (and now valorized) experience, we are implying that solidarity is impossible, when in reality solidarity can appear in the absence of sameness, sympathy, or even familiarity.[4] And this solidarity is essential to convergence among different social groups. Rather than valorizing Others alone, we need emancipatory political moves that can valorize *while* building bridges across differences.

This brings us to the third concept, which is probably the most conceptual and difficult to explain: differencing. Instead of taking for granted the categories of opposition in which movements may find themselves operating (e.g. Black vs white; undeserving criminal 'illegal alien' vs hardworking migrant laborer), differencing emphasizes seeking new categories, identities, and unities-in-difference that can be constructed in particular times and places, based on particular histories. Differencing can be thought of as a process by which a new 'we' is created, but without obscuring the

4 To be clear, of course people who've been through particular experiences bring particularly valuable insights to societal problems and their solutions, and it is important to listen to people of particularly marginalized positions. But uncomplicated "listen to Black women" type of discourses are not politically attuned to differences within categories (i.e. which Black women?), nor do they offer insights into how larger political coalitions can form beyond groups composed of homogeneous categories.

differences contained within this new 'we'. It doesn't assume we all need to become the same, in order to unite politically or socially, it doesn't demand that Others become assimilated to mainstream politics, it doesn't force them to validate their political claims *only* through an existing valorized identity. Differencing unsettles and expands categories of identity and political community, without necessarily denying the valorization that sustains self-worth in those existing positions or categories of identity.

For instance, a political organizing process can value and exemplify the traditions and contributions of Latinx communities to food systems – incorporating *altares* and *místicas* and traditional agroecological knowledge – but also ask participants to consider what connections there may be between Latinx farmers and farm workers and other migrant (but not-Latinx) farmers/workers.[5]

Thus, differencing is a collective process of unsettling existing categories (am I "Latinx"? Or an exploited "worker"? Or both? What do these categories even mean to me? What more am I? What connects me to others?), building new affinities and identities (are we "landless peasants" now? Who else is a "landless peasant"?), and generating political projects across differences (who else might we build towards truly widespread land access

5 It would also not ignore consequential differences *within* the Latinx community.

with?). But differencing isn't just abstract or about questions. It can be a very tangible thing. As we work together and for each other in real world projects, we build true senses of belonging and commitment.

In the conclusion, I advocate that movements use assimilation and valorization strategies (as they already do), but with caution about their potential side effects that can work against coming together and movement convergence; and that we especially focus our efforts on processes of differencing, to build bigger "we"s, mutual understanding, and tangible ties between our communities.

The bulk of the work: what I actually found and discuss

The next section of the dissertation (two chapters) describes some of the tensions in food movements that we see today. These operate among various lines of difference, and the dissertation focus is largely on race, but also includes discussion of gender and patriarchy, professionalization and class status, as well as urban-rural dichotomies and tensions. Those chapters also deal with tensions in social movements around the use of the state (i.e. governmental powers) and entrepreneurial strategies (e.g. profitable farm projects to fund activism) to achieve progressive social change. Here I'll give a little synopsis of these chapters on contemporary food movements.

The first "lesson", which may be obvious, but hasn't been said much in scholarship, is that US food movements are changing, alongside shifts in racial politics at large in society.[6] That is, as US society grapples with racial inequality (once again), issues of racial inequality within the food movement have come to a head, and have caused some level of "racial reckoning" among movement groups/organizations. These groups, often spurred on by individuals with the chutzpah to call out problems and challenge how these groups operate (and how they reproduce white supremacy), have increasingly tried to change their rhetoric and practices towards greater "diversity, equity, and inclusion" (DEI). This "DEI" stuff is also seen in larger more powerful institutions like corporations and universities – and I don't wish to validate them unproblematically (in fact, I have whole sections in these chapters about critiques that the world of DEI is simply a way to peel off critical voices of the underclasses, to undermine more radical goals and actions that challenge white supremacist capitalism). BUT, still, it seems clear to me from many interviews (and from watching this transition firsthand in spaces like California's annual EcoFarm Conference) that there is authentically a transition happening, where it is less viable in white-led/white-dominated food movement sectors to ignore race, or ignore the structural problems of inequality in food systems and society.

A second claim I make is that, as POC voices and perspectives are more and more included in food movement spaces, the politics

6 Certainly, with regards to the idea that today's food movements are less white or more race-conscious that in the past, one could make the argument that it's not so much a change in movement composition (i.e. there have always been POC in food and farming activism) as in the visibility of race issues.

of those spaces, organizations, etc, are becoming more radical. By radical, I describe a "north star" of emancipatory politics, given Marxist, anarchist, Black, and Indigenous critiques of the status quo of injustice. This north star points beyond capitalism, and past the colonial-capitalist nation-state form: a truly emancipatory future would be economically post-capitalist, and politically would be governed in some way other than via the existing state (which, according to these critiques, is essentially oriented towards reproducing extraction, exploitation, oppression, and injustice). This claim does NOT mean that I'm saying all POC formations are 'radical' in this way (they certainly aren't), but that as POC voices are included, deeper critiques of the structure of society become more visible and even accepted, and these result in stronger skepticism towards things like capitalism, the state, and individualistic/meritocratic ideas, and greater investment in longstanding strategies of the racialized underclasses like mutual aid, alternative economies, and collectivism.

This is all material from my Chapter 5, which also introduces the critiques and proposals of emancipatory politics from (intersectional) Marxist, anarchist, Black, and Indigenous perspectives. For those interested in this 'big theory' stuff, this would be a good chapter to check out.

The second part of that chapter discusses the tensions within and between movement groups, even if there seems to be some positive momentum towards greater (and better) tackling of racial dynamics within the movements. This is the stuff I wrote specifically for those working in these movements, as it's the challenges we so often face: interpersonal issues – which reflect a

lot of established inequalities in society, but don't *only* reflect them as a mirror image; inter-organizational issues, inter-sectoral issues (meaning between 'sectors' like farmworker advocacy and small farm advocacy); and philosophical issues, which are the deeper disagreements about things like the fundamental problems of capitalism and colonialism, and if and how to deal with them.

Interpersonal

Interpersonal conflicts and tensions emerge constantly in any social space. Such conflicts often embody macro divisions and relations of power (such as racism or patriarchy) within the micro level of personal experience. The 'classic' formula is seen when people of marginalized social status are further marginalized in interpersonal interactions and organizational choices, based on their group identity, status differentials, and structural power imbalances. These dynamics are not new to US food movement scholarship. There are three other related dynamics, however, that I feel have not received due attention or analysis: (1) increased performativity of allyship in a context of heightened awareness of social injustice; (2) inter-ethnic, POC non-solidarity; and (3) the perpetuation of harms along racist, sexist, generationally-unjust lines by members of marginalized and Othered groups.

To elaborate just a little,
(1) is about the fact that with the 'racial awokening' dynamic discussed earlier, there are more instances of people (especially

those in 'privileged' positions) standing up or speaking up against injustice. This can be good, as 'call-outs' from the past can reverberate as changes in organizational structures and processes later on.[7] But it can also be harmful, when *performing* allyship is more important than tangible changes, and when it causes more finger-pointing and division than healing and growth.

(2) is about a lot of things, but simply refers to the fact that there are lots of different people of color and marginalized groups, who do not always or even often stick up for each other in the process of seeking justice for their own group/identity. Middle and upper class POC can perpetuate injustice on poor members of the same racialized identity, even if they hold similar political ideas about race. Then there is also the "oppression olympics", when one kind of oppression is pitted against another to see who is "most oppressed"; this is not a great way to build larger solidarities and power. There is the use of one form of oppression to obscure another (e.g. calling out misogyny and kicking cismale members out of a POC group on dubious grounds when control of the group's funding is at stake, even though those who remained in the group were the members from upper-class backgrounds who less need the funds). What I try to remind folks in this section is that (a) we should look from many different angles at these kinds of 'interpersonal' struggles (as indicated by the term 'intersectionality'), and (b) not let *political or practical* differences be recast as about "oppression/privilege" issues, when this is more a ruse than a reality.

7 An example of this is how the EcoFarm conference has long been critiqued for its whiteness, and cluelessness about better including long-marginalized voices (POC, Indigenous folks, queers, migrant workers). But in the last few years, bolstered by the work of a "Diversity Action Group" within the planning process, some POC attendees have reported an actual change in the flavor and feeling of the conference.

This relates to (3), which is the sadly-true and unfortunately-not-discussed-much reality that *even people from marginalized backgrounds can act shady and be fucked up to each other!* This seems both too obvious to say, *and* too controversial. Most of the examples I encountered in my research were of "men behaving badly", i.e. patriarchy rearing its ugly head. These were POC men who are/were considered leaders in food justice work. These are surely not the only examples, and we need to grapple with this more directly and vocally if we are to improve our groups' effectiveness to tackle oppressions originating *outside* our groups. I suppose that people are resistant to discussing this kind of internal movement drama because it is considered "airing dirty laundry". But how are we supposed to make effective change if we allow people in our immediate social circles to cause harm and don't address it? When we pretend it's only cis-hetero-male-white-settlers (or name-your-perfect-enemy here) who are at fault for problems in society, we are limiting our analysis of what's going wrong, our visions for a better world (and who can be included), and the means of actually advancing towards that better world.

Inter-organizational/sectoral

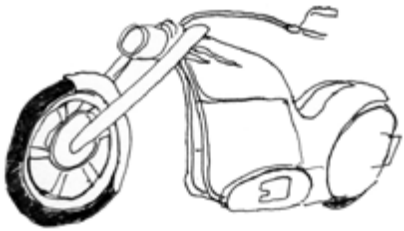
A central issue I discuss in this section is the influence of the "Non-Profit Industrial Complex", which is a shorthand way of describing how nonprofit organizations (particularly 501c3 groups with tax exempt status in IRS code) have become the established way of organizing for social change, but are actually in many ways set up so as to undermine radical change efforts, to reward those whose politics coincide with the elite-driven status quo, and to demobilize the downtrodden when they push for change in disruptive, confrontational ways. Even if those who

make up nonprofits are well-intentioned, the structural way that nonprofits are set up, funded (through foundations, philanthropies, and government grants), and managed limit their political potential. These critiques are laid out well in the book "The Revolution Will Not Be Funded" by INCITE! (highly recommended).

In terms of my research, I saw the structural constraints on organizing from the influence of funding and policy institutions and processes. These influences change organizational focus and strategy, like how grant-givers structure what organizations actually do, or how state agencies excommunicate activists who are too confrontational or call into question sacred cows (like capitalism). The fact that each organization or sector takes a different approach to those structural constraint conditions then generates more tensions within the movement – as people line themselves up to abide by the structure, challenge it lightly, confront it, or seek ways around it. Two other inter-organizational tensions I talk about are (1) processes of dialogue or deliberation that reproduce or do not address existing inequities, and (2) the ways "professionalism" can temper pushes for change, reinforce disempowering movement organization culture, and undermine the valorization of non-professionals from non-elite communities. For instance, many government and private sector-involving efforts to reform food systems seek "dialogues" among "stakeholders", but these dialogue spaces are often premised on everyone participating from an equal starting position (which isn't true), and are facilitated to avoid questioning things like the right to profit from land accessed only due to colonial dispossession. They also often assume that the purpose of gathering is to generate policy outcomes to implement, which centers the role of the

(problematic) state, rather than impacted communities, and limits imagination of change to that which can be achieved in the narrow, constrained, momentum-towards-injustice-following bounds of state policy-making.

As one of my favorite new authors Tyson Yunkaporta claims, "Inclusion is one of the four horsemen of the apocalypse". The Romans, Yunkaporta reminds us, made great efforts in the dying years of their empire to begin including previously-excluded minorities in the empire's management. Today's rapidly-expanding DEI initiatives, supposedly 'inclusive' (but structurally and ideologically problematic) dialogues, and the Democratic Party's fake-woke inclusion politics (e.g. a Navy vessel being named for gay liberation leader Harvey Milk!?) all point to this pattern today. Even if we aren't so cynical about inclusion, we should be skeptical about the details of who, how, and for what purpose of any particular instance of inclusion. And how, in the ongoing politics between food movement groups and sectors, this kind of politics can interfere with true and useful differencing. Of course, differencing requires dialogue, so that must be part of any transformative process. But that dialogue should acknowledge starting power inequalities, be transparent and honest about the roles of conveners and facilitators, and should not be forcing participants into outcomes that are essentially pre-determined by those with more power.



Philosophical

This is a hard section for me to make a synopsis of. It addresses the BIG questions that lay behind so much of today's activism. When you peel back the layers of food systems problems, you find that capitalism, colonialism, and the state are root causes. (White supremacy and patriarchy are of course wrapped up in these, but I address in the chapter how our philosophies and theories about how to overcome the first three have been crucial wedges in between different movement sectors and groups). There are long standing and persistent debates on the question of whether and how to oppose capitalism, including the difficult reconciliation of long-term ambitions and short-term 'realpolitik'. Some argue pragmatically for working within capitalism, others that radical politics must include an anti-capitalist rhetoric, agenda, vision, and practice (I am in this latter group). A similar question appears about countering colonial realities: whether and how to advance decolonization? Like revolutionary socialism, decolonization seeks to fundamentally transform a society away from the very system it is rooted in and based on. Hence these two debates are both fundamentally about questions of 'revolution', a long-standing tension in issues of emancipatory movement convergence, and one that is closely related to perceptions of and attitudes towards urgency. Urgency paradoxically works both ways, as it can underpin people's claims that *more radical* change is needed – and quickly! OR it can be used to justify using the 'powers that be', especially the power of large corporations to shift market behaviors (e.g. large environmental nonprofits working with Coca-Cola or Nestle on 'environmental' innovations in industrial production), or big and powerful states to direct resources

here or there (e.g. Green New Deals that are problematic on internationalist terms, or are means to save capitalism more than to save the planet). I also saw instances where generational differences affect how people relate to urgency, with younger people often less patient than elders with the pace of change (for better or for worse!).

As I advocate in the conclusion, we need movements that can combine attention to capitalism's negative effects and structural influence on us, and attention to various kinds of Othering and lines of difference that overlap with – but aren't the same as – capitalism's effects. Like colonization's effects on global economies and Indigenous resurgence, or anti-Blackness's unique properties within a larger field of white supremacy, or partiarchy's difficult persistence within both structures of power and our movements against them. To get closer to convergence from so many positions requires an openness to this dialogue about capitalism and Othering, and frank discussions about different perceptions of urgency and strategy.

Chapter 6 of my dissertation focuses on how the studied food movement sectors deal with the state and with market economies, and why (potentially) they do so. This includes dealing with details in how they vary in their state/market approaches, how different sectors combine with each other politically on these questions, and how they (of course) differ internally. That is, for instance, some farmworker-focused organizations might work on state policy, while other farmworker-focused organizations are dealing more with direct service or grassroots organizing. Some may do both. The reason why I wanted to do this analysis was to seek

a better understanding of the role of the state with regards to emancipation (in thought and in practice). Too much of the food movement scholarship, in my opinion, takes on a very liberal worldview that assumes the state is a "neutral" arbiter of interests in society, and that if one wants to change society, one must act first and foremost through the state.[8] This (in the scholarship) is often pitted against the more recent ideology of "neoliberalism" that argues "we" should achieve change mainly through the market. And so, movements that (a) don't work mainly on changing the state and its policies, and/or (b) seek change by taking part in markets in one way or another are often derided/critiqued as being "neoliberal", or reinforcing neoliberalism.

This take seemed wrong to me on instinct. Granted, I already had anarchist affinities coming into this research, but the idea that (e.g.) Black people who were enslaved by and for the colonial project of the United States, or Indigenous people who were targeted for genocide directly, unquestionably, for generations, by that state, or migrant workers who are essentially non-people legally in the eyes of that state, would all find the state as a viable

8 Even when it is more critical of the state, most scholarship still presents an implicitly statist view of politics and change.

emancipatory strategy seemed silly to me. And indeed, what I found was that POC formations – while not completely or dogmatically against engaging the state or for using the market – hold more commonly and strongly skepticism of the state. This makes sense, historically, and intellectually. Similarly, because of those histories where these sectors have had to make use of nonstate and other means of change, by nature of their constant exclusion, today their movement organizations are more likely (than white-dominated groups/sectors) to use nonstate methods and to hold more radical politics that point beyond the state. They also use market strategies, but more so in cooperative and self-reliance terms, than in profit-making, expansionist, colonial-capitalist ways. There is, to my mind, a difficult to define and fine line between making money for community benefit and making it to assimilate and become part of the capitalist system – but nonetheless, my findings argue that we (scholars) should not see use the of market as strategy as purely 'bad' or neoliberal, and stop assuming that movements *should* focus on the state and policy if they are to be 'properly' radical or effective in combating neoliberalism.

One thing that really resonated with me from my interviews was the very nondogmatic approach that so many Indigenous interviewees and subjects took to these matters. For instance, while private property in land is antithetical to most of Indigenous worldviews (even considering the differences among Indigenous tribes/peoples), some Indigenous organizers use land trusts – which work within the state-managed, private property regime – to enable access to land. This access enables resurgence practices of land management, ceremony, sovereign food systems, etc, even

if they stop at overthrowing capitalism/the state. Yet, those same organizers will not hesitate to confront the state and call private property in question, via words but also actions such as occupying lands being threatened with development. The point is, Indigenous resurgence theory seems (to me) to point to a radical politics that always holds to a radical 'north star', and speaks to deeply held values and does not compromise them, yet deals pragmatically with *what is*, and uses any and all vehicles to advance its cause.

As an "antidogmatist' for 20+ years, I like this :)

Conclusions: SO WHAT?

The dissertation conclusions provide answers to the original dissertation research question. Obviously, agrarian and rural movements in California are diverse, and so they describe and manifest emancipatory politics in differing ways. In general, though, I characterize recent movements as moving towards more radical positions regarding race, capitalism, and the state – perhaps because of increasing influence of POC perspectives.

To the extent that these radical positions can be strengthened, shared across differences, and brought to bear on practical political decisions and investments, they are well-suited to address the deeper origins of rightwing power (because that power is rooted in race, capitalism, and the state). Instead of reinforcing problematic institutions that reproduce inequalities and Othering (such as capitalist enterprises or colonial-racist states), these politics create a larger sense of We; they can create new institutions of production, distribution, moral economies, and

political decision-making; build and deepen relationships which are essential for any long-haul struggle; and through processes of open-hearted dialogue and differencing (outside structures of policy and funder mandates) they can effectively connect various forms of marginalization, including that based on race, ethnicity, geographic origin, economic class, gender, radical political views, sexual orientation, and age.

In the dissertation, I offer some implications for both the theory of social movements and the practice of creating food systems change. Here, I focus on the practice part – as I expect that would be most useful for the greatest number of people. One key conclusion of this work was that it encourages us to value non-state positions in social movements, and not to dismiss these as inadequate simply because they operate outside the state or at a small scale, do not seek change through the state, or because they use entrepreneurial strategies at times. Through discussion of the Non-Profit Industrial Complex, the reformist de-radicalizing effects of government processes, and the limits of seeking change merely through forming farm/food enterprises that are viable within capitalism (and how these dynamics temper the radical potential of food movement groups), the dissertation also encourages a more cautious eye towards how and when groups involve themselves in state government and small business.

Knowing that the issues of addressing state power, creating viable food production units within the existing economy, and funding social change work won't simply go away because they are compromised and complicated, I propose five strategies that are practical for those who work for food systems change and want

to advance the convergence of diverse and different movement sectors into a stronger, more unified political force. In brief, these strategies or approaches are: (1) doing the work of making change with humility (especially when the existing structures of power benefit you, at the expense of others), (2) starting work at the interpersonal level but always keeping in mind "structural" conditions and issues, (3) sparking and advancing explicit dialogue on the relationships between dynamics of capitalism and Othering, (4) accompanying redistributive talk (which currently seems popular) with redistributive action, and (5) accepting and embracing the generative nature of conflict.

Let me offer more details on these.

1. The unpredictability of how convergence occurs – for instance, sometimes workers unite across racial divides against their bosses, sometimes they scab on each other to advance themselves – demands an openness and humility from movement participants who seek collaboration across differences. Simply said, we can't always know how social change will happen, and so we should probably not act from certainty about our particular approach. This humility is extra

important for those with status/privilege, as the uneven playing field already exists against those from marginalized/Othered backgrounds, and is tilted against more radical political positions and tactics. So if you, for example, work on policy, or on USDA-funded projects to train new farmers, and if you are white, or well-educated, or upwardly-mobile, you should be humble about your preferred 'theory of change' with regards to the work being done by other groups.

2. In this humility, action is rooted in relational (individual and interpersonal) work but must move 'up' from there, recognizing that social structures always weigh upon us. That is to say, we are most effective when we connect with people, work with people, and build real and reciprocal relationships. This is deep work of "organizing", versus the light touch of advocacy in online petitions and (relatively) anonymous demonstrations that simply display grievances. But, only working locally, with people you know or build relationships with, isn't enough, and we must bring in (at least in our discussions of our strategies and activities) thinking about the social structures that are influencing how this relational work advances. This includes considering the structural influences on us as individuals, on our organizations, on the political environment, and on our options to try something new. This can also include being a bit more generous of spirit to others with who you might not be on the 'same page', but may at least be in the same book: when we acknowledge that larger forces make our (radical) food movement work very difficult, we can be less critical of others around us for their supposed blame for 'our' (collective) lack of success.
3. It is essential to pursue explicit dialogue to surface beliefs,

values, tensions, and alignments – particularly with regards to various axes of Othering and capitalism. I mentioned this earlier, but (from doing this work myself, for this dissertation project) I know that too often, movement groups/nonprofits are discouraged from projects of 'aimless talk'. Dialogue between groups that is not directed towards policy outcomes or 'win-win' solutions desired by elites are rare in funded food movement work. We must make radical questioning of our conditions and our solutions common, in organic farming training programs, in food justice grocery stores, in food co-ops, in urban farms, and so on. As Fred Moten and Stefano Harney describe it, we need to "renew our habits of assembly" and "study" together – this has always been the seedbed of movements for radical change.

4. Lately, it has become more hip to call out injustice and to use the right words to describe it. A prominent example of this is the new prevalence of "land acknowledgments" – where people introduce events at universities, think tanks, and whatnot by acknowledging that the event is taking place on unceded territories of this or that Native tribe. I call this "redistributive talk" because it redistributes (to some degree) the space of thought and discussion towards those who have been receiving very little for generations. This may be a good thing, but as many of my Indigenous sources told me, it is problematic when it is taken as a 'checkmark' to do, and isn't accompanied by any action. Discourses to counter Othering must be accompanied by actions that redistribute resources. For land acknowledgments, these can simply be ended by pointing to active local Indigenous struggles, and getting people to involve themselves. Action beyond words is especially

needed that works against unequal relations within movement sectors and between them, and that builds in the here-and-now resources for collective action and for community resilience. This is why mutual aid work, and the building of infrastructures of food and care outside the money economy (or at least, padded from it), are so important.

5. Both dialogues about inequalities and injustices and redistributive actions to rectify those can elicit conflict, discomfort, and negative reactions. But these are necessary elements to transformative change (especially for the relatively privileged) and so movement people should be less fearful of this generative conflict. Sometimes, they might even plan for it, and know that to the extent that the powerful are becoming uncomfortable, they are likely doing their activism well. Here I am inspired by the examples from a new book (based on a dissertation!) about scholar-activists against industrial agriculture in California. It's called *In the Struggle* (by O'Connell and Peters), and I recommend it for those interested in how we can use knowledge, organizing, and institutional positions to bring down the empires of harm that characterize most of our contemporary food systems.

I'll conclude by saying, although I can't reproduce the long thank you list in total that came with the dissertation, I really appreciate all the folks who I interviewed for this research, who talked with me about its contents and ideas, all those who attended the encuentros, and all those who continue the struggle. I also want to offer deep gratitude to those whose support made this process possible since 2018, particularly my mother Nora Roman, and Vanessa Radman, who was both emotionally and physically

supportive as I moved through the pandemic times, frustrations of having tendonitis from the very start of this PhD process, and challenges of parenting while working from home. So very grateful, I can't express it enough.

I also want to put a caveat that I wrote this very quickly in a week's time, mainly to get it out on time for my dissertation defense in November 2021. So, it's likely less thought-out, refined, nuanced, or perfect as I'd like it to be. I hope you'll forgive me :)

With love,

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