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Abstract

Foodscares and foodways are increasingly spaces of struggle and contestation in the city. Food justice studies have exposed that lower-income residents and people of color tend not to participate in alternative food initiatives. Much of this marginalization originates in the often exclusionary practices and discourses from members of the alternative food movement who overlook their own privilege and whiteness and ignore the food experiences of vulnerable groups as well as the obstacles they face to purchase food. In this paper, I contribute to the scholarship on urban food justice by examining how Latino residents experience, reflect on, and confront exclusionary practices in the spaces and discourses of alternative food activism in the city. Through empirical research conducted during and in the aftermath of a conflict around a new Whole Foods store in Jamaica Plain, Boston, I analyze how food injustice and food privilege has been produced over time in a neighborhood that used to have a variety of culturally-sensitive food options -- but which have been disappearing in the last decade, -- and how access to a variety of foods has been jeopardized. I also unravel how environmental racism and food privilege can affect the relationships that a community has with its food, invisibilize its members and its cultural and social food practices, and in turn affect their place-making and their territorialization in the neighborhood.

Key words

Urban environmental justice, gentrification, food privilege, foodscares, food justice, colorblindness, food racism, place-making.

Introduction

On any day of the week in Jamaica Plain, Boston, Latino customers would anxiously wait for the opening of Hi-Lo Foods, a grocery store catering products from all over Latin America. Vans of residents from elderly homes would stop in front of Hi-Lo for their weekly trip to buy camote, yucca, café, mate, or recao, a Puerto Rican herb used for cooking a variety of dishes. Local Latino men would set up milk crates in front of the store and hang out after their shopping trips. Others would spend hours sharing life stories inside the supermarket. Hi-Lo was much more than a supermarket. It was about a neighborhood, a community, and valuable place and safe haven for local residents and customers. However, on January, 14, 2011, the same day that Knapp Foods Inc., the owner of Hi-Lo, announced that the business would be closed, it also revealed that it would be sold to Whole Foods and converted into a Whole Foods Market. The months that ensued saw a virulent conflict breaking out between supporters of the new store and activists who protested the opening of a Whole Foods Market. Why are protests arising in the United States against food providers that praise themselves for offering healthy, wholesome, and natural products and for being community inclusive?

Food access has been defined as the ability to produce and consume healthy food and to have equal access to the environmental benefits of healthy food (Alkon and Agyeman 2011b). The language of access spread as advocacy and policy efforts sprouted over the US – from neighborhood activism in Pittsburgh or Oakland to Michelle Obama’s Let’s Move campaign – to address food deserts or fast food jungles, that is underserved neighborhoods in which supermarkets and fresh produce shops are scarce, while fast food restaurants and corner stores amount (Neil et al. 2004; Smoyer-Tomic, Spence, and Amrhein 2006; Beaulac, Kristjansson, and Cummins 2009; Guy, Graham, and Heather 2004). In States such as Maryland, New York, and North Carolina, low-income neighborhoods have half as many supermarkets as wealthy neighborhoods (Moore and Diez Roux 2006). Access has an impact on purchasing behavior as lower-income families have been shown to travel on average between 1 and 1.6 miles to do their food shopping (Hillier et al. 2011).

Many food justice organizations are fighting to ensure that lower income and minority residents are able to

afford fresh food in their neighborhood. Food justice is also part of a broader social justice and environmental justice agenda as community development and affordable housing organizations as well as community health organizations have embraced a vision that brings together food and economic development on the one hand, nutrition and health outcomes, and community empowerment (Gottlieb and Joshi 2010). Yet, many so-called alternative groups and organizations praising the importance of healthy, local, and organic food have not sought to incorporate a food justice lens in their activism. They develop alternative food movement discourses by promoting local food production and consumption as well as the revamping of the corporate food system and agri-business, but they fail to consider the racial and social inequities within the food system, and often remain colorblind when promoting healthy and organic food (i.e., Guthman 2008).

Conflicts such as the protests and activism in Boston against the arrival of Whole Foods and its defenders illustrate how controversial, polarizing, and intimate the issue of food is (Winson 1993). How did the closing of Hi Lo arise previously silent or silenced voices fighting against food privilege and warped notions of food access? Why did the social and cultural values and meanings of food become suddenly so prominent among the activists' discourses? In this paper, I use semi-structured interviews, newspaper articles, videos, blog entries, and other secondary data gathered during my field work in Jamaica Plain, Boston to examine the production of food privilege and food injustice in a neighborhood of color. I argue that both the arrival of Whole Foods together with the mobilization of its enthusiasts triggered a conflict in which Latino residents and their supporters contested both the slow dismantlement of a just neighborhood from a food access standpoint and the colorblindness of pro Whole Foods supporters.

Voices and controversies in the food movement and food justice movement

Food access is defined as one's ability to produce and consume healthy food and obtain equal access to the environmental benefits of healthy food (Alkon and Agyeman 2011b), while food sovereignty is the community's right to define their own food and agriculture system (Via Campesina 2002). Food is not just a nutritional commodity but a fundamental human right. Within the question of food access, the reality of *foodscapes* is particularly relevant, as it brings to light the complex daily survival practices of locating and purchasing food for low-income residents, who have to go to cheap corner stores and joints, subsidized cafeterias, or soup kitchens, while, for instance, not being able to afford the new gentrifying cafés and boutique restaurants burgeoning in their changing neighborhood (Miewald and McCann 2013; Short, Guthman, and Raskin 2007). Foodscapes help us understand specific places in dynamic ways and exposes the relationships that a community has with its food. It is related to "foodways", that is "the cultural and social practices that affect food consumption, including how and what communities eat, where and how they shop and what motivates their food preferences" (Alkon et al. 2013: 127).

In the 1970s in the US, a food movement emerged as an attempt to change the parameters of food production and target industrial food systems for their impact on the health of ecosystems and people. It was composed mostly of white and middle class activists vowing to regain control over the production, processing, and distribution of food (Morales 2011), and it continues today to push for local, organic, slow food in contrast with industrial food production. In the 1970s and 1980s, community gardens and community-shared agriculture initiatives started to mushroom in the United States. Alternative food activism -- which was built around the political economy of food, -- conceived local food systems as an alternative to the abuses and excesses of the global agri-business market made of multinational grain traders, giant seed, chemical and fertilizer corporations, and global supermarket chains, with its alienating and unsustainable characteristics (DuPuis, Harrison, and Goodman 2011). Of central importance here is the connection between hunger and processes occurring at multiple scales – from local to global (Heynen, Perkins, and Roy 2006).

As part of this activism, the food movement also responded to the relocation of supermarkets and grocery stores to suburban areas where businesses could increase their prices, have greater parking space, and open

bigger stores than in lower-profit areas. Such trends contrasted with the landscapes of unhealthy foodscapes within inner city neighborhoods, where the remaining supermarkets rarely sell nutritious and fresh food (Sloane 2004; McClintock 2011). The practice of suburban relocation, called “supermarket redlining” (Eisenhauer 2001), excludes low-income and minority residents from access to fruit and vegetables and other healthier food options. It is coiled in urban development dynamics such as de-industrialization, policies such as urban renewal, and racial and social housing segregation (McClintock 2011). As a result, today food deserts are more concentrated in low income and minority neighborhoods than in wealthier communities (Beaulac, Kristjansson, and Cummins 2009; Smoyer-Tomic, Spence, and Amrhein 2006). While many neighborhoods of color can abound with small corner stores and ethnic grocers (Raja, Ma, and Yadav 2008; Short, Guthman, and Raskin 2007), the food sold at those places is often processed and not highly nutritious and fresh.

Despite the engagement of food movement activists to create more local, community-owned, sustainable food production and consumption systems, the groups most at risk of facing food insecurity, of losing their land and resources to the agri-food complex, and of working in indecent conditions in large agrifarms, -- that is people of color and low-income groups, -- are mostly absent from the rhetoric and practice of food movement activists. Lower-income residents and people of color tend not to participate in alternative urban food systems, as they either do not have the material capacity to purchase goods from those networks, or as such markets or food distribution venues do not reach inner-city neighborhoods (Allen 2004; Morales 2011; Perez, Allen, and Brown 2003; Guthman 2011). Yet, the alternative food movement fails to consider these circumstances and tends to marginalize vulnerable groups in its struggles (Alkon and Agyeman 2011b; Slocum 2006). Its discourse and practice often stems from a position of social privilege (Alkon 2012).

Alternative food movement activists often underestimate the obstacles that African Americans, Latinos, or Native Americans face to benefit from farmers’ markets or CSAs that are sprouting in urban neighborhoods. In northern California for instance, the managers, vendors, and customers at farmers’ markets have been shown to hold preconceived ideas about farmers and community members, which reflect a richer and more liberal habitus of whiteness. (Alkon and McCullen 2011). Markets are shaped by white cultural practices of consuming (Guthman 2008a). Such a behavior makes it challenging to confront the inequalities present in the alternative food movement. Similarly, veganism is mostly associated with privileged white groups who do not include the realities of people of color in their calls for consuming vegan food. For instance, traditional vegan books such as *The Skinny Bitch* ignore questions of race and class and do not consider the broader socio-economic, spatial, and racial processes that have affected the ability of lower-income people to eat fresh produce and have contributed to their increased obesity rates (Harper 2011).

In other words, people who embrace slow food, vegan, and organic food rhetoric practices do not always consider the broader societal and cultural footprints that they leave behind. Considerations of social justice and food sovereignty are absent in their discourse and practices (Mares and Peña 2011). Adopting a fetishist attitude about their call for organic food, they also fail to recognize the negative aspects of the corporatization of organic food, with large corporations advertising humble family origins and locally scaled family food production, while in reality getting much of their food from large factory farms and making strategic decisions based on a corporate logic (Guthman 2004; Johnston, Biro, and MacKendrick 2009). The commitment of the alternative food movement to food democracy is thus threatened by the growth of the organic corporate market.

The absence of people of color and lower-income residents from alternative food practices has been shown to originate, among others, in the colorblindness of the food movement and its commitment to a post-racist society. As geographer Rachel Slocum argues, whiteness is embodied and produced in alternative food practices (Slocum 2007). For instance, alternative food activists call for reincorporating native plants and seeds in food production without considering that groups such as Native Americans have deep local knowledge of seeds such as heirloom seeds and have incorporated them in their land for generations in their

own attempt to challenge the mainstream food system (Mares and Peña 2011). Similarly, white farmers from the alternative food movement conduct workshops targeted to historically marginalized communities and use motivation slogans such as the “value to put one’s hand in the soil” without realizing that they invoke past images of slavery and slave labor among African American farmers (Guthman 2008a). Participants thus feel at times invisible as they navigate through white spaces and experience a lack of cultural competency.

One step further, some have even argued that the privilege from which whites have benefited in the shaping and reshaping of land uses and agricultural practices in the United States and beyond turns into a ‘metaprivilege’ (Flagg 2005) when food activists ignore their privilege and their whitened cultural histories. For example, white regulators might not grant Native Americans fishing rights for species that were part of their traditional diet, making this absence of right an added variable in their forced assimilation (and this combined with a lack of recognition of historic land occupancy). Whites ignore the cultural specificity and roots of their histories and experiences and see them as universal (Guthman 2008b). As a result, this lack of recognition allows them to feel morally good about their work in the alternative food movement (Guthman 2008a; Sullivan 2006). They assert their privileged positionality without reflecting on the historical traumas that have destabilized local food practices and systems. They are the ones who get to define the discourses and acceptable production and consumption practices around alternative food consumption.

Yet, land and food have a deeper historical and cultural value to historically marginalized groups. Land and food play a much more holistic cultural and socio-economic role than “just” fulfilling nutritional needs (Alkon et al. 2013). Among African American farmers, land has been shown to be more important than money as it provides economic security, community stability, and independence from dominating groups (Gilbert, Sharp, and Felin 2002; Green, Green, and Kleiner 2011). Community cooperatives in the Black South enable Blacks to secure livelihoods. Food is also part of heritage cuisines (Allen 2004; Delind 2006; Esteve 1998; Mares and Peña 2010). Through the cultivation of land, especially in cities, people of color become reconnected to a set of traditional practices and dishes. For Latin American farmers, growing food is about “comida”, that is the cultural practice of dishes (Esteve 1998). Growing food also helps minority farmers re-make place in their new city and community (Anguelovski 2014). It helps people foster a new place-based identity in a new landscape and territory (Mares and Peña 2011). As the experiences of urban farmers in the LA South Central Farms and the Seattle Putget Sound Urban Farm shows, food production allows for the creation of social and cultural relations that recreate a deep sense of place. When people lose their newly found productive land, as was the case in the LA Farms in 2006 when 360 families got evicted, migrants from Latin America experience trauma and a second displacement in their life.

The right to healthy, fresh, local, and affordable food for community food security has been at the center of community advocacy for greater food justice (Alkon and Agyeman 2011a; Gottlieb and Joshi 2010; Hess 2009). Taken into consideration the more complex values and significance of food within the lives of historically marginalized groups, the Food Justice movement confronts the traditional discourses of the alternative food movement. It is basically playing the same role that EJ activists were playing thirty years ago when they positioned themselves away from traditional environmental organizations such as The Sierra Club or WWF and their focus on protecting wild ecosystems and natural resources without considering the people who might depend on those resources for their livelihoods (Bullard 1990; Gauna 2008; Schlosberg 2007; Shutkin 2000; Dobson 1998; Pulido 1996; Sandler and Pezzullo 2007; Martínez Alier 2002). Already back in the 1980s, EJ activists connected questions of food, racism, and urban development together (Pinderhughes 2003). In 2002, the Second Environmental Leadership Summit included “sustainable agriculture” as one of its themes, denouncing the loss of local food security among vulnerable groups. Today, the dynamic and broad Food Justice movement confronts an alternative food movement that does not seem to consider the reality of poorer residents and people of color and only increases inequalities by working on improving access to organic and fresh food for wealthier residents (Alkon and Agyeman 2011b).

Many food justice organizations include racial equity and anti-racist messages in their work in addition to demanding equal access to food. For instance, through the Growing Power Farm in Milwaukee, the Growing Food and Justice Initiative works to address food injustices by promoting community-based food systems adapted to the needs of people of color and by empowering residents in marginalized areas (Morales 2011). It associates food security with anti-racism and sustainable agriculture. Similarly, the Food Project in Boston is a long-time pioneer of training programs for youth that combine creating a sustainable food system, fostering a sense of racial and social awareness, and offering tools for community empowerment (Anguelovski 2013). Organizations such as the Nation of Islam and the Pan African Orthodox Christian Church are committed not only to addressing hunger issues among vulnerable populations but also to seeking autonomy, self-reliance, liberation, and community improvement for Blacks (McCutcheon 2011, 2013). Some farmers' markets emphasize the roots and wealth of Black cuisine and culture while encouraging the support of Black farmers (Alkon 2008). In that sense they contribute to a critique of food being used as a way to construct the "common citizen" of the nation into whiteness (Watson and Caldwell 2005). Similarly to the mission of organizations such as the Downtown Eastside Neighborhood House in Vancouver, they demand a Right to Food, linking democracy, environmental justice, and citizenship (Miewald and McCann, 2013).

Today, despite this wealth of studies on the inequalities in the alternative food movement and on food justice activism, more research is needed to understand how and to which extent Blacks, Latinos, and other marginalized groups experience exclusionary practices in the spaces and discourses of alternative food provision (Guthman 2011) and how they counter them through their own discourses, activism and community organization. It is essential to better examine how environmental racism and privilege can affect racial identity formation (Alkon and Agyeman 2011b), place-making, and territorialization for these groups. More food justice studies are needed to help the EJ movement and scholarship enrich its understanding and conceptualization of race knowing the importance of food for building and maintaining one's identity. Last, to date little has been researched on the role played by healthy food stores and their defenders in undermining people of color's food practices. This paper will thus examine the following questions: How does food privilege and food injustice get produced through the expansion of so-called alternative, organic, and sustainable food chains and how do local activists experience and confront the exclusionary discourses and practices conveyed by their defenders? In other words, I focus here food as a space of struggle and contestation in the city.

Methods and Case Study Presentation

Research design

This paper is based on a the analysis of an emblematic and critical case study of a conflict around a so-called healthy food store, Whole Foods Market, which opened in October 2011 in Hyde Square, the Latino area of Jamaica Plain (JP) in Boston, amidst much controversy and debate in the neighborhood and beyond. From 2011 to 2013, I collected primary data from local newspapers (the Boston Globe, Boston Herald, Boston Phoenix, the Jamaica Plain Gazette, the Jamaica Plain Patch), local radio stations (WBUR), and local community organizations and groups (i.e., Jamaica Plain Neighborhood Council, Hyde Square Task Force, Jamaica Plain Neighborhood Development Corporation) in the form of newspaper articles, videos, reports, comments, and blog entries from supporters of and opponents to Whole Foods. My goal was to better understand the broader context in which the controversy took place, the development of the conflict over time, the stakeholders involved, and the perceptions and interpretations of the supporters and opponents in regards to Hi-Lo's closing and Whole Foods's opening.

In 2012, I also conducted fieldwork through semi-structured interviews in Jamaica Plain. The 19 interviews included members of a Whose Foods/Whose Community coalition which protested the arrival of Whole Foods, members of the JP for All Coalition which voiced their support to Whole Foods, members of the JP Neighborhood Council (and members of the Whole Foods Ad-Hoc Committee), JP Neighborhood

Development Corporation, the Latin American Family Culture Network, the Hyde Jackson Square Business Association, Hyde Square Task Force, Whole Foods employees, the former manager of Hi-Lo, local food business owners, and members of local groups and organization working on community farming. The interview questions I asked were related to the interviewee's perception of Whole Foods' opening, his/her involvement in the conflict and motivation behind this involvement, the broader perceived impact of Whole Foods on different community aspects and on affordability issues, and finally the relationship between food, place, and identity in the mobilization. I analyzed my data using process tracing and analytical narrative tools, which helped me build stories of activists, understand their individual and collective identities, examine their engagement in the neighborhood and their vision for it, and comprehend how they used some narratives to develop their resistance and build support around them.

The conflict over Hi-Lo/Whole Foods in Jamaica Plain, Boston

Much of Jamaica Plain has traditionally been a Latino neighborhood, especially around Hyde Square. Many African American families also live in Jackson Square, which borders Hyde Square. Gentrification in Jamaica Plain is a phenomenon that goes back to the late 1980s, when a substantial portion of the LGBT community, artists and musicians, as well as white progressive baby boomers moved to the neighborhood in search for more affordable houses. During the last decade, gentrification has accelerated with demographics changing more profoundly. According to the 2011 US census data, JP lost 1,041 Hispanic/Latino residents between 2000 and 2010 (close to a 10% decline) and 862 African American residents (a 14.6% decline), while the White population grew by 5.4%. During that time, the median sale price for a house raised from \$241,750 in 2000 to \$375,000 in 2011, and today this price is higher than Boston as a whole (\$362,500) (Department of Neighborhood Development 2011).

When Whole Foods announced in January 2011 that it would open a new store in Hyde Square, divisions erupted between supporters and protesters. Supporters of Whole Foods tended to be Whole Foods' traditional constituency of white, liberal, middle to upper class residents who engaged in alternative food practices, some Latino business owners, and some Latino property owners in JP. Those supporters appreciated the convenience of a new Whole Foods in their neighborhoods, the business opportunities potentially arising from new customers, and well as possible higher property values. Whole Foods opponents were made of a group of lower-income Latinos, college-educated Latinos who became social activists, white liberal residents who had lived in the neighborhood for a few decades and lamented the gentrification of the neighborhood, many community workers, and college students from within and outside the neighborhood.

When Whole Foods announced its arrival in Hyde Square, it declared that its objective was to "provide access to the freshest and healthiest local, natural and organic products at an affordable price,"¹ including produce, meat, seafood, and fresh bakery products. It replaced Hi-Lo Foods, a Latino institution which operated in the neighborhood for 47 years and was considered the biggest and best Latino market in the State, and some say, in New England. Very soon after the announcement, protestors started hanging anti-Whole Foods banners in Hyde Square and raising their voice against the new store in newspaper articles, online forums or street events. On February 8th and 28th 2011, the Jamaica Plain Neighborhood Council (JPNC) convened two public forums in which young and old attendees, Latinos, blacks, whites, supporters and opponents expressed their concerns or support about the arrival of Whole Foods.

Whole Foods' opening remained at the center of much of the local media and local blogs during February and March. The conflict gave rise to two coalitions: "Whose Foods" against Whole Foods and "JP for All" in support of the new supermarket. The JPNC became the locus of much of people's anger or excitement, which prompted the Council to organize a vote on Whole Foods on March 8th, in which Whole Foods was declared as "not a food fit for Hyde Square." Later in March, the JPNC created an ad-hoc committee to evaluate Whole

¹ <http://www.wholefoodsmarket.com/stores/jamaicaplain>

Foods' impact in the community and propose concrete steps to address divisions and conflicts in the community. During Spring 2011, local politicians such as city councilor Matt O'Malley, Councilor-at-large Felix Arroyo, State Senator Sonia Diaz also intervened in the debate in an attempt to acknowledge community suffering and appease both sides.

While coalition members continued to discuss Jamaica Plain needs at several public venues, the JPNC together with 79 community members worked on the Whole Foods impact report. On June 28, 2011, it released a 70-page report, pleading for affordable, healthy, and culturally-appropriate food and examining gentrification in JP. Among others, the report examined issues of food affordability in JP by producing a "supermarket comparison" of items such as fruits, vegetables, meat, culturally-appropriate products, and other basic items. According to the report, among 13 staple items Whole Foods' prices were 39% higher than Hi-Lo's, while prices at Stop & Shop, another local full-service grocery store, were 12% higher than Hi-Los. Whole Foods also did not offer basic Latino items such as plantains and white cheese. This study confirmed the trends in meat and produce pricing examined by a Boston Globe study that same year. This difference in pricing is substantial in a community where 65% of Latino residents earn a total income of less than \$35,000 per year (Jamaica Plain Neighborhood Council 2011). The report also provided a series of recommendations for a Community Benefits Agreement with Whole Foods.

Upon the report release and the realization that Whole Foods was going to open its doors no matter what in the Fall 2011, anti-Whole Foods protestors assisted by the JPNC focused their fight on the Community Benefits Agreement. However, they did not succeed. What they won is local hires for Whole Foods employees and 5% sales days to be given to local community organizations. For many months to follow, opponents remained active on a variety of small issues, including permits for outdoor sitting at Whole Foods, but slowly their fight began to die off. However, two years after, the community still remains divided and scars are still deep. Why was Whole Foods so polarizing and why did it become the site of such a strong resistance? Why did differences become so entrenched in a place that praised itself of being inclusive, open, and solidary? How did food privilege and food injustice get produced?

Analysis

Proximity does not equal access and affordability

Firstly, the closing of Hi Lo and arrival of Whole Foods in Jamaica Plain symbolized the difference between proximity and access as well as between proximity and affordability of certain foods. Most debates on promoting the consumption of organic and local food ignore that accessibility is not about physical proximity. In Jamaica Plain, the opening a Whole Foods store did not translate into the provision of healthy and affordable food for people of color, and anti-Whole Foods protestors denounced the absence of debate about pricing as Whole food announced that it would open a store in JP. As many activists explain, lower-income residents buy what they can afford in order to make a large meal that can fulfill the needs of their families. The owner of the restaurant El Oriental de Cuba summarizes this reality:

"Whole Foods is whole paycheck. One pepper is \$1.5. At Hi Lo, people used to fill a shopping cart for 45\$, now you have a small shopping bag for 100\$. If I wanted to go out and spent \$100, I'd go eat at Legal Sea Food".

With the closing of Hi Lo, Latino residents found that the reliability of affordable food disappeared. They feared that they would not be able to buy and eat any more what they can afford, as a young adolescent activist shares:

"You buy and eat what is in your budget. My mom can't afford Whole Foods. She buys in big containers. Mac Donald or Burger King, we eat it but it's bad for us. It's right in the neighborhood,

it's less expensive. You have single family parents who live on child support. We know we can't afford WF. You have to eat somehow."

During the conflict, those residents and their supporters received the backing of some middle-class Whole Food consumers who might drive to Whole Foods stores in higher-class parts of the city such as Brookline, but who protested having a Whole Foods store in JP. They valued less the geographical convenience of a new Whole Food within walking distance of their home than the cultural diversity and affordability of their neighborhood. They also treasured having a greater diversity of lower-income Latino restaurants than seeing them replaced by higher end Latin or Spanish restaurants. Those supporters recognized the inequalities in JP – families living on the Jamaica pond side and families on the other side whose children consume "teenies" (drinks with very high sugar content) – and refused to be part of their exacerbation.

The closing of Hi Lo is not the only manifestation of changing food options and loss of affordable and accessible food practices in JP. In the 1970s, a Cooperativa de Comida (Food Coop) was formed in the neighborhood and was very active during the anti-highway movement in Boston thanks to the influx of young activists. It was a big crossroad for Latinos and Whites with people gathering around the development of the coop. However, internal fights made it difficult to keep up the model of the coop. In regards to urban gardening, in the late 1980s and early 1990s, when local activists – many of whom who had participated in the Cooperativa de Comida – took over vacant and often contaminated plots in JP to transform them into gardens and urban farms, many leaders and participants were Latinos. Latino gardeners would visit other plots and provide advice to each other. They organized festivals such as "Wake up the Earth in JP". They used festivities to talk about gardening and food and to celebrate the environment, as one of the daughters of a former gardener recalls:

This was during the time of environmental racism and dumping. My mom worked with Latino women and turned a dirty space into green space. Gardening was the symbolic meaning of love and of taking care of somebody. My mom grew up poor in a farming family and appreciated healthy eating. Food was product of love."

Back then, groups such as Boston Urban Gardeners lobbied the city for creating new gardens in Jamaica Plain, using the argument of healthy eating, bringing people together, and saving money. While gardens used to feel like an oasis of people mixing racially and economically, many residents and activists today see that new gardeners who work in the gardens in JP lack an understanding of the history of the gardens, show some disrespect for them, and ostracize the vulnerable groups of Latino or Black gardeners.

In other words, food coops, community gardens, and local farms are mostly white spaces in Jamaica Plan, thus furthering food privileges in the neighborhood and creating new environmental injustices in the neighborhood. Local Latino activists and their supporters regret that local food practices are shifting in JP for the benefit of white gardeners and harvesters. Gardens such as the Paul Gore and Beecher Street gardens were considered Latino gardens, but are now farmed by young professionals or hipsters in the 30s and 40s. They are a clear symbol of the neighborhood gentrification. Some gardens such as Nira Roundhill Community Garden behind Hyde Square are in a predominantly Latino and Black portion of the neighborhood, but gardened by whites. As workers from the Boston Natural Areas Network, which supports many community gardens in Boston, emphasize, the irony is that the wealthier families are the ones who are now working in the gardens and benefiting from the savings of growing their own vegetables:

"One of the main goals of community gardeners is food access and reducing environmental impact. It is also important in terms of economic justice as people had access to fresh food. Savings can reach \$450 a season. Who is getting that? As neighborhood changes, these savings become inaccessible. There is an equity issue.

The socio-economic changes in favor of wealthier and whiter gardeners make many Latino gardeners feel displaced and feel out of home. They do not see themselves reflected in the gardens and feel at times alienated, which is also part of the garden retention problem. As gardens and food coops become more white and higher-class and stores such as Hi Lo close, Latino residents and their supporters feel that food inequities and food privileges are growing in the neighborhood, and that JP is turning from a ‘just food neighborhood’ to an ‘unjust food neighborhood’ – in contrast to many inner-city neighborhoods in the US which are actually seeing new urban farms and gardens farmed by people of color and witnessing the arrival of more affordable full-service supermarkets. Trends in Hyde Square are reverse.

Their anger at growing food inequities in JP is particularly profound as many residents fought for years for bringing in more affordable supermarkets to JP. For instance, when Stop and Shop opened in 1992, Hyde Square residents saw their food access drastically improve through a new 30,000 square feet full-service supermarket that offered them fresh produce, fish, and meat. Rather than leaving the city, as many other supermarkets in Boston, Stop&Shop actually had begun a program of building new, larger stores in the city. This opening was also the result of important resident mobilization and organization, as Juan Gonzalez recalls:

“We wanted a source of affordable food and Stop&Shop was the best option. It was the first supermarket in the inner city”

Stop&Shop was a new service to the community. It fulfilled an important need. This is why Whose Foods coalition members were particularly angry at hearing and or reading claims such as the one about Hyde Square being a “food desert.” They felt that these comments disqualified mistakenly the food options that existed in the neighborhood for the benefits of those who can afford more expensive and exclusive stores such as Whole Foods.

A loss of socio-cultural and socio-spatial food practices and foodscapes

In contrast to Whole Foods and to traditional supermarkets like Stop&Shop, Hi Lo was a melting pot of Latin American food options and a cultural haven for Latinos. Through the grocery store and the medium of food, local Latino cultural identities became strengthened over the years. Latino customers were the ones who actually made Hi-Lo Latino though the diverse food items they constantly proposed to the store and through the word of mouth they used to advertise the store and its items. With its closing, the heart of Latino foods and culture has been removed. The variety of Latino products is not represented anymore in the neighborhood, and is not compensated by the presence of bodegas, which tend to lack product diversity and do not sell fruit and vegetables. It is not compensated by Whole Foods either since the store does not carry many culturally-sensitive and affordable food products. Similarly, Stop and Shop is not able to fill the multi-faceted vacuum left by HiLo, as its manager explains:

“Hi Lo had unique items but we have difficulties sourcing products. We can’t be the same as Hi Lo. The scale would not be worth it for us as company to chase down assortment. We are a big corporation. And maybe people are not as comfortable giving us suggestions. Maybe it’s a language issue. We don’t have as much feedback as expected.”

Latino customers in Stop and Shop do not feel the same level of comfort as in Hi Lo and do not find the wider variety of products as in their former supermarket. For many Latinos, structural racism has thus become exacerbated in the neighborhood.

Even if Hi Lo customers were aware that some of Hi Lo labor policies were questionable, they had built tight relations of trust with the former manager and his team in regards to the provision of different products. The manager was truly committed to catering to his customers’ needs and was always accessible to them directly

(unlike what Whole Foods seems to hold in the minds of the Latino customers as community engagement practices). It was a very straightforward and clever management style, as Hi-Lo’s former manager recalls:

“I ordered big quantities and discounted them. People would cook for their entire families. I had frozen food, dairies, creams, cheese, and aisles organized by region – Carribean, Spain, Mexico, etc. People were very interested in what the store carried. I always tried new products. It was a big family. We got everything from like 100 companies, even bread from Puerto Rico.”

Over the years, Hi Lo had become a store responding actively to the demands of its Latino customers. It was the only place in the region with food from 23 countries. The store embodied the variety of Latino cultures living in JP and beyond, and made the residents and customers feel respected and valued. It was an anchor business, which was financially viable, and helped the community grow.

Hi-Lo was not only a store to buy a variety of culturally-relevant food staples, it was also a social meeting place where customers inside or outside the store would nurture existing social relations, share life experiences, and just converse about life, families, and the Latino community. In contrast, members of the Whose Foods coalition regret that the social and cultural aspects of food are absent in Whole Foods and that it feels more like a transient space. Yet, Whole Foods supporters seem to overlook the cultural and social significance of food and forget that Hi Lo was a central hangout and gathering food for Latinos in JP. Hi Lo had created a new sense of place in the neighborhood and allowed immigrants to re-territorialize their traditions and socio-cultural food practices. As Kyle, one of the members of a community organization relates:

“Everyone would go by van, but now they get things delivered. There is a loss of place. It was a haven for Latino people if it was portrayed differently. People felt comfortable and it was also the same language. People gravitated towards this.”

Former customers explain that people would bring milk crates and play dominos in front of the store. People would stay on benches on the side. Much social interaction was taking place around available jobs or apartments in the neighborhood. Information would be passed down, which created a strong sense of mutual support and tight community. It was a cultural networking place, which was very important for disadvantaged people. It felt like a family, it was home, the heartland, a Latino place to be and to meet, as many Hi Lo supporters emphasize. Today however, many former Hi Lo customers, especially the elderly, stay at their home and do not shop outside. Others shop online. Many social and cultural rituals were created through Hi Lo and its loss has not been compensated. Part of the neighborhood cultural history disappeared with its closing. Whole Foods has preserved the older murals and clock, but the former Hi Lo customers lament that the substance of what Hi Lo embodied has vanished. As lots of residents have been living in JP for 40 years and saw the opening and now closing of Hi Lo, its closing is experienced as traumatic loss for them and produced fears of erasure from the neighborhood.

In addition to being a socio-cultural meeting venue for customers, Hi Lo was a place that helped Latinos re-create and strengthen cultural practices around food. Hi-Lo’s former manager remembers:

“You could smell bread at 7am. We would bring the latest newspapers and they’d go crazy. And they bought coffee. We had an oven, nice and hot.”

These practices helped Latinos feel more at home in the country to which they or their parents moved. The closing also took away all the other social food practices that they used to engage into once they would finish shopping at Hi Lo. People would go to restaurants such as Tacos El Charro or the Miami restaurants and continue to socialize there. This would be part of another ritual around food and a showcase of Latino culture through food stores and restaurants. However, those places are now struggling financially, as they have lost

many of their Hi Lo customers who walk much less through JP. Their loss of business could indicate the slow closure of several Latino owned food businesses in a neighborhood where the first businesses were Cuban. The only moderate-price restaurant that is doing quite well is El Oriental de Cuba because it is renown throughout New England and has a broad customer base.

The colorblindness of healthy food discourses in JP

During the neighborhood conflict, the discourses conveyed by Whole Food supporters about healthy food were not welcomed positively by Whose Food coalition members who resisted the socio cultural imposition of what is healthy food and eating. For instance, they accused the Whole Food supporters of remaining caught in a discourse of “I Love organic food and do not eat processed food” or “Eat less but eat better,” which did not find much cultural acceptance among people who felt frowned upon for their food choices. Words such as “organic” or “healthy food” have a negative connotation in the context of a Whole Foods replacing a Latino supermarket and in the general context of the alternative food movement in the US. Discourses about healthy foods were at times very condescending and rested on the assumption that Latinos do not eat well and eat processed food, while Latino activists highlight that they have produced organic rice and beans before whites did and that white farmers are the ones who added chemicals to the fields. Grains or plants now fashionable within whole food eaters, such as Quinoa or Mate, are traditional items in the Latino culinary culture, but privileged groups have appropriated them in their discourses and practices, thereby reflecting colorblindness and metaprivilege. They also point that food cooked from Whole Food products can be highly unhealthy, and condemn what they called the hypocrisy of Whole Food consumers. In turn, they regret that Whole Food supporters do not recognize the sustainable practices of low-income residents and residents of color. Norma Rey, one of the most active members of the Whose Foods explains:

“I could go to Whole Foods and pack a meal full of sugar and cream. The important question is how you cook the food. I could make something healthy from HiLo. It’s how you prepare and cook the food. We were battling constantly these insults of white-dominated institutions. There is no acknowledgement that low income are very good at sustainable patterns to stay in JP. You already do something that is sustainable, you are creative.

In other words, many Hi Lo supporters experienced structural and social racism towards the food bought, owned, and grown by Latinos and saw it as an attack on their food sovereignty. Today, “healthy food” is a class and racial marker, but many lower-income Latinos emphasize that many Latinos are vegetarian holistic eaters, are used to cooking healthy meals, and that Latino markets can be healthy too. In that sense, many Whose Foods activists fought the messages and practices that Whole Foods convey, such as the daily use of “little shopping bag that is recyclable.” Whole Foods itself as a brand was criticized for manipulating the image of organic food. Far from everything that Whole Foods sells is organic, locally produced, and minimally-processed, but the brand portrays itself as a supermarket selling natural foods and sustainable products. As a result, many Latino activists do not recognize themselves at all in wide-reaching calls asking people to “eat organics”.

In addition, part of the frustration of Whose Food coalition activists against the JP for All coalition stemmed from Latinos feeling offended from hearing non-Latino members of this alternative food movement make claims on behalf of Latinos about food and hearing racist judgments about their food and the former store they were shopping at. Whose Foods members felt that Latino cuisine and food venues were being ostracized and looked down upon. They denounced words such as “unhealthy food”, “dirty supermarket”, “dark,” “smelly food” (about Hi Lo), “they come from the third world” (about Latino residents). They blamed people for declaring “Now, I can eat healthy” (through the opening of Whole Foods). For instance, some of the JP for All coalition members told the press:

"More middle-class people have been moving in for a while now, and thank goodness. I say thank you to all those people who have come in and made this a safer, quieter, and cleaner place".

Others added: "Hi-Lo was sad run down, it smelled, it was never clean, and had bad quality food."

In sum, two drastically opposed discourses were produced and reflected upon in regards to Hi-Lo and Whole Foods. Those discourses embodied a clash of cultures over food. Hi Lo supporters called Hi Lo a "modern business model" with items listed by country, negotiated prices, and money spent on important aspects such as heating, AC, and flags from other countries and as a business which catered to customers' needs, while Whole Food supporters felt that their opponents were "against progress" or "against development." Latino activists saw the other side as lacking an understanding of the progress of the whole community and only being centered on their own individual progress. They considered Whole Foods as a "sterile" supermarket with standardized and homogenous food, which might be beautiful and with a nice landscaping, but is not serving the community needs and does not represent people of color, not makes them feel at ease. Kyle from the JPNDC explains:

"Whole Food lacks people speaking Spanish at the checkout. Their way of doing food business is also a huge cultural shift. There are more pushy customers at WF."

Whole Food opponents thus view the contrasted discourses about Hi Lo and JP as a representation of class and racial divide in the neighborhood. They perceive that the previous image of a multicultural, tolerance, and progressive community that JP was only superficial and that gentrification is increasingly hurting and excluding lower-income Latinos. One older activist Rosalba, explains:

"We heard some nasty comments like 'dirty and smelly foods.' It hurts. This is a very mean attitude. The words were not about food and gentrification but just racism from neighbors. We felt we had created a diverse community with tolerant human beings, but this gentrification shows us who we are in the community. It's more than food."

People started feeling excluded from a neighborhood and a country they helped build by words such as "You are trash, and you eat trash, and you can go back to your country". Police forces were also aggressive towards Whole Foods activists, intervening during media interviews and telling Latino activists "Adios, get out."

For many anti-Whole food activists, the fights became a question of racism and socio-cultural privilege. According to them, the conflict exposed the position of white middle-class residents in JP who felt that Latinos opposing a Whole Food in their neighborhood were threatening their own privilege. Norma, one of the most active members of the Whole Foods coalition explained her frustration at those standpoints:

"They are saying insane things when they see their privilege taken away. We can not go to the bodegas! They are a convenience store! You are telling me that I should go to six convenience stores and to Stop and Shop. You are imposing your privilege".

Many Whole Foods protesters also scolded JP for All coalition members for feeling silenced in the different public meetings that took place in JP through 2011 and not having their voice heard, when white middle-class citizens are usually the ones who are silencing people of color. An important cultural dissonance for liberal JP residents surfaced during the conflict: On the one hand, they saw themselves as healthy, compassionate, and responsible consumers with a loyalty to a store that serves some of the types of food they value, but, on the other hand, they expressed hurtful judgments towards Latinos. Some activists perceived that there was a misalignment between being a good consumer and being a good liberal. They consider that the misalignment came from supporting a huge corporation like Whole Foods but hating Walmart. However, Whole Foods

supporters defended themselves by arguing that prices are Whole Foods are not that expensive, that the company has good labor practices, that Whole Food will sell marketable culturally available food, and that it will bring new people and money to the community.

In other words, the conflict exacerbated differences in points of views, values and preferences about foodways and foodscapes, and revealed that Whole Foods supporters underestimated the issue of race, together with equity, justice, and sovereignty. Consequently, a few months after Whole Foods opened, tensions between groups were even palpable on the street and wounds have not healed.

Discussion and concluding remarks

Foodscapes and foodways are increasingly spaces of struggle and contestation in the city. Food justice studies have exposed that lower-income residents and people of color tend not to benefit from alternative food initiatives (Allen 2004; Morales 2011; Perez, Allen, and Brown 2003; Guthman 2011). In addition, much research has shown that activists who promote the consumption of local and organic foods fail to consider the circumstances of traditionally vulnerable groups as well as dimensions of social justice and food sovereignty in their discourses (Alkon and Agyeman, 2011; Slocum 2006; Mares and Peña 2011). They tend to overlook their position of social privilege (Alkon 2012), impose their white cultural practices of food consumption (Guthman, 2008a), and even ignore their meta-privilege (Flagg 2005). Much of this marginalization tends to originate in the colorblindness of the alternative food movement (Guthman, 2008a). This colorblindness is particularly problematic knowing the complex reality of foodscapes for marginalized residents (Miewald and McCann 2013; Short, Guthman, and Raskin 2007) and the rich social and cultural practices that people of color develop around food (Alkon et al. 2013; Allen 2004; Delind 2006; Esteve 1998; Mares and Peña 2010).

In this paper, I have attempted to contribute to this scholarship on food justice by examining how Latino residents and people around them experience, reflect on, and confront exclusionary discourses and practices from alternative food activists. Through the analysis of a conflict around changing foodscapes in JP, especially the opening of a high-end “natural” supermarket in place of a large and historic Latino supermarket, I unraveled how food injustice and food privilege has been produced over time in a neighborhood that used to have a variety of culturally-sensitive food options – and not only a Latino grocery store but also Latino restaurants and Latino-farmed community gardens. Through the course of this paper, I showed how environmental racism and privilege can affect the relationships that a community has with its food, invisibilize its members and its cultural and social practices around food and beyond, and in turn affect their place-making, identity, and their territorialization.

In Jamaica Plain, one of the ironies of Whole Foods’ opening is that while it will enhanced for all residents the *proximity* of more organic foods, including fresh produce, it does not enhance *access* to healthy foods for the lower-income households and residents of color living in Hyde Square and its surroundings. The closing of Hi Lo signified the end to affordable food in the neighborhood for Latino and lower-income residents. Changes in supermarket choices are accompanied by the disappearance of Latino gardens and gardeners in JP and by the presence of more expensive food coops, thereby exacerbating food privileges in the neighborhood and creating new environmental injustices after decades of fighting for greater environmental and food equity and against food deserts. Such changes create feelings of displacement and of being out of place in the neighborhood. Latino residents express a sense of alienation and of sudden abandonment. The conflict in JP is a manifestation of how the alternative food movement can increase inequalities and isolation by working on enhancing access to organic and fresh food for wealthier residents without considering the foodways of Latino people.

Furthermore, the closing of Hi-Lo and immediate opening of Whole Foods signified the loss of a socio-cultural

food haven for Latinos through which Latinos' individual and collective identities had become showcased and strengthened over time and food sovereignty exercised. The closing of Hi Lo eliminated the heart of Latino foods and culture without compensation, thus creating feelings of structural racism in the neighborhood and beyond. The store embodied for decades the diversity of Latino cultures with a management style that responded directly to the demands of its customers for product search and provision. The immense variety of products' sources by Hi Lo made Latinos feel respected and valued in JP and beyond as clients but also as member of an ethnic group. Hi Lo was a place that promoted and strengthened the culinary heritage of Latinos and allowed for the re-creation of a deep sense of place and re-territorialization. Such a process was also possible because Hi Lo was a social destination where people would spend hours mingling and networking. After shopping, customers would also visit other Latino businesses in JP, thereby furthering traditional social-cultural practices around food and strengthening the Latino culture in JP. Such broader practices and traditions have been drastically eroded with the closing of Hi-Lo and are now jeopardizing the viability of those businesses.

Last, the conflict in JP rose in intensity because of the discourses conveyed by Whole Foods supporters about Hi-Lo and its customers (and directly and indirectly about Whole Foods). Many assertions about healthy foods were based on the assumption that Latinos do not eat well and eat processed food, and they overlooked Latinos' varied food practices – especially the organic and natural food practices –, including those who shopped at Hi Lo. At the same time, those discourses appropriated in a colorblind way some of the natural and valuable items of the Latino culture, such as Quinoa. In return, Latinos and their supporters rejected words such as “organic food” and “healthy food” because of the connotations they carry and because they feel that some of the people who promote such food choices are hypocritical. Many Whole Food coalition members perceived structural racism towards the food bought, owned, and grown by Latinos. Some of the racism felt very personal and individual as their opponents used negative and at times offensive qualifiers to describe Hi-Lo and the products it sold. According to many opponents to Whole Foods, the conflict brought to light the position of white middle-class JP residents who feared that their own privilege of choosing where to shop for food was been threatened.

In sum, Latinos opposed the fact that white middle-class people are traditionally the ones who get to define the discourses and acceptable consumption practices around alternative food consumption. They attempted to make their own cultural claims about space, territory, and food in the city while contesting white middle-class visions of food access, foodscapes, and healthy food as well as their colorblindness and food privilege. They refused to become invisible and out-of-place in their neighborhood through the creation of new white foodscapes. An important policy and planning question thus remains open on how to foster greater food diversity in the city without creating exclusion, food privilege, and environmental gentrification at the expense of historically vulnerable groups and people of color whose place in the city is traditionally under threat.

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FOOD SOVEREIGNTY: A CRITICAL DIALOGUE INTERNATIONAL COLLOQUIUM PAPER SERIES

Food Sovereignty: A Critical Dialogue

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A fundamentally contested concept, food sovereignty has – as a political project and campaign, an alternative, a social movement, and an analytical framework – barged into global agrarian discourse over the last two decades. Since then, it has inspired and mobilized diverse publics: workers, scholars and public intellectuals, farmers and peasant movements, NGOs and human rights activists in the North and global South. The term has become a challenging subject for social science research, and has been interpreted and reinterpreted in a variety of ways by various groups and individuals. Indeed, it is a concept that is broadly defined as the right of peoples to democratically control or determine the shape of their food system, and to produce sufficient and healthy food in culturally appropriate and ecologically sustainable ways in and near their territory. As such it spans issues such as food politics, agroecology, land reform, biofuels, genetically modified organisms (GMOs), urban gardening, the patenting of life forms, labor migration, the feeding of volatile cities, ecological sustainability, and subsistence rights.

Sponsored by the [Program in Agrarian Studies at Yale University](#) and the [Journal of Peasant Studies](#), and co-organized by [Food First, Initiatives in Critical Agrarian Studies \(ICAS\)](#) and the [International Institute of Social Studies \(ISS\)](#) in The Hague, as well as the Amsterdam-based [Transnational Institute \(TNI\)](#), the conference “Food Sovereignty: A Critical Dialogue” was held at Yale University on September 14-15, 2013. The event brought together leading scholars and political activists who are advocates of and sympathetic to the idea of food sovereignty, as well as those who are skeptical to the concept of food sovereignty to foster a critical and productive dialogue on the issue. The purpose of the meeting was to examine what food sovereignty might mean, how it might be variously construed, and what policies (e.g. of land use, commodity policy, and food subsidies) it implies. Moreover, such a dialogue aims at exploring whether the subject of food sovereignty has an “intellectual future” in critical agrarian studies and, if so, on what terms.

The Yale conference was a huge success. It was decided by the organizers, joined by the [Land Deal Politics Initiative \(LDPI\)](#), to hold a European version of the Yale conference on 24 January 2014 at the ISS in The Hague, The Netherlands.

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