

AN ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS OF

Laura Bennett for the degree of Master of Arts in Environmental Arts and Humanities
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on Farm, at Market, & Online

Abstract approved:

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Mainstream local food systems focus on environmental and individual health, but labor is out of sight and out of mind. We begin with a story that introduces the immigrant in the room, the locavore's blind spots, and the need to move beyond mainstream environmentalism and embrace social justice. In the first chapter, we open up to the critiques of food scholars over the past decades and explore why they have remained in the academic echo chamber when other narratives prevailed. Next, we examine Willamette Valley local food discourse through analyzing a variety of publications and events. Next, we explore a season of my own work in radicalizing the discourse I produced for a broad audience of locavores, ending with a discussion of the efficacy of the way we communicate on the edge of radicalization. Next, we take a deep dive into a prominent local farm, introducing an alternative to the popular narrative, a history inclusive of migrant labor that follows the trajectory of radical action on farm throughout time. Finally, we explore the pivotal 2018 season on the women's crew at that same farm, a unique and complex moment in the history on our local small farms. Beyond food, it is time for mainstream local food movements to get radical and form the alliances necessary to change the structures that exploit the people and the planet. The engaged citizen has many tools sharper than consumption when wielded on common ground.

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Radicalizing Food: Navigating the Radical Fault Lines of our Local Food Systems—on
Farm, at Market, & Online

by
Laura Bennett

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APPROVED:

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I understand that my thesis will become part of the permanent collection of Oregon State University libraries. My signature below authorizes release of my thesis to any reader upon request.

Laura Bennett, Author

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DEDICATION

This work is for my community. It is dedicated to all of us in our fight for collective sovereignty, but it is especially dedicated to all those who have been historically excluded from the local food systems of the dominant population, particularly the migrant farmworkers who give their bodies and their lives to growing our food. Thank you.

The Immigrant in the Room—the story before the story



Figure 1 Lettuce for cut salad mix in the back field at Oregon Organics Farm, 2018—photo by Laura Bennett

I can remember when I first fell in love with produce. I was standing in this same exact field. Only it was June, and the early morning sun was warm on my cheeks as it spilled over the hills onto the lettuce patch. There were deep purple Little Gems, robust romaines, and bodacious rosettes of butters. I can look down and see my Mucks nestled carefully between chartreuse pompoms of oaky-lobed leaves that glow neon against the chocolate cake loam. Green Oak Compact. That was my favorite.

The expert lettuce picker gives the center of a head a quick jiggle to be sure it's not starting to bolt and in the same motion tilts the lettuce to the side and slips a knife through the perfect point, allowing the rough outer leaves to fall off but no more. I loved arranging the heads neatly

into harvest totes, becoming more efficient and ergonomic by the day. I loved hoisting each full tote onto my shoulder and feeling my hips sway back and forth as I carried my little preciouses to the shade.

I loved everything about it. I loved getting up in the dark and riding my bike into the farm. I loved gearing up with the crew in our waterproof bibs and being on the back of the transplanter. I loved making a fool of my millennial self as I giddily stalled my way around the farm in an old flatbed called The Fish Truck, which read F O O D on the hood rather than Ford.

Every day was different even though every day was the same. I had no idea that something like lettuce could take so many different forms, look so different every day, taste so different throughout the season. We washed the head lettuce first thing in the morning before it would wilt, gently scrubbing the cut ends with our palms as we dragged each head through a cool water bath. Next came the bunched greens, of which I particularly enjoyed washing cilantro and radishes.

My hands learned to grab two bunches of cilantro at a time as I sprayed the mud out of the pale white rootlets. The fragrant power of cilantro is never stronger than in this moment. Radishes, on the other hand, were a treat for the eyes rather than the nose. With them, I grabbed each delicately arranged bouquet of mud and blasted them until they became the radiant pink orbs they were destined to be.

Even when it was August and I was so tired from working markets and throwing watermelon and processing peppers and ultimately drowning in a sea of never-ending tomatoes, sorting them one by one, day after day, biking home, biking back, growing ever-confident that my cyclical existence had no meaning, I took pleasure in getting to know my new vegetable friends so intimately. Pick up tomato. Feel its weight. But don't bruise it. Is it too soft to make it to market? Too sun-scalded for a restaurant? Not uniform enough for the grocery store? Just right to pop into my mouth right now? Pick. Wash. Pack. Repeat. This is how I fell in love.

I grew up living in apartments in suburbia, eating box mac, Stouffer's lasagna, and instant mashed potatoes. We didn't have a garden or own a dining table. Food was always a cost, often

a crutch, and rarely an actual nourishing experience. If not purely by contrast, farm life was intoxicating.

After a few years working in the packing shed and out in the fields, I started managing our farmers market booths and became enthralled with a concept I called Vegucation. I wanted to tear down the intimidation surrounding cooking and eating real food for people like me who were just starting to dabble in the local food scene. I wanted everyone to feel what I felt.

So I became the voice of your favorite local organic farm. I am that wide-eyed lady at the farmers market who's always giving out free samples of some root thing that you've never heard of and now can't live without. I am responsible for the romantically-lit headshots of beets paired with a Tom Robbins quote in your Instagram feed. My hands are the ones who write your CSA Newsletter, keeping you up to date with life on the farm. There are many food writers like me. We are your couriers, your hostesses, your chaperones, from farm to table. It's okay if you don't know what kohlrabi is and we are here to help you. In the words of the one and only Michael Pollan, we are here to "lure you in with pleasure," for the betterment of your health and that of our oppressed little blue dot.

Seven years later, I am still here, only there are alliums planted where the lettuce was. I stand in my experienced harvest stance, finishing up bunching scallions on a misty winter morning before I retreat to the office to write you another vegetal ode. But as with all loves, this seduction of salad, this hot pink radish romance, this steamy cruciferous crush, well, it's become more complicated. I don't know how I didn't see it before because now it's all I can see.

Today, as I stand bent over the scallion patch, ripping handfuls of stalks from the soil and smacking the dirt off on my boot tip, effortlessly slipping the thin skins off each stalk as my hands form my bunch on autopilot, I know that I can't keep writing about farming as if it were flawless. I can't even have a regular conversation with my coworkers anymore. There is an elephant in this movement. Some people know it. But most people don't.

“Más alambres!?” [*More ties?*] Berta yelled from across the field. She began walking down the row and yelled again, “Chicas, más alambres?” [*Ladies, more ties?*]

“Yo tengo cinco,” [*I have five,*] I yelled back without looking up. “Tengo ocho,” [*I have eight,*] another girl replied down the bed.

“Dame unos,” [*Give me some,*] Berta said as she jolted my way.

“Claro, mi amor, un regalo para ti,” [*Of course, my love, it is a gift for you,*] I replied, looking up with a smile as I handed Berta three of my twist ties, knowing very well that despite my experience she could definitely bust out three bunches in the time it took me to do two. She giggled and dropped her tote down next to mine.

“Qué bonito los escallions aquí! Y porque no me dijiste nada?” [*The scallions are so nice here! And why didn't you tell me?*] she said jokingly with a swoosh of the hip. There are many Latinx migrant farmworkers who work at the farm in the heat of the season, but Berta is one of the few who stays year-round. We have become quite close over the years, she's a particularly sweet soul who reminds me a lot of my childhood best friend — such a worrywart.

Berta was always worried that we should be picking from a different part of the field, that we weren't working fast enough, always looking out to make sure that I was drinking enough water throughout the day even when she was not herself.

I laughed and said, “Necesito todo lo que puedo conseguir para trabajar tan rápido como usted!” [*I need everything I can get to work as fast as you!*] We both laughed, spun our finished bunches in unison to seal the twist tie, tossed them darts into our respective totes, and moved onto constructing the last few. “Voy a salir después de escallions hoy,” [*I'm leaving after scallions today,*] I reminded her.

“Ay no, no me dejas con estas chismosas,” [*Ay no, don't leave me with these chatty Kathies,*] she lamented, and I laughed. “Vas a hacer el kimchi?” [*Are you going to make kimchi?*] she said curling her nose and waving her hand rapidly in front of her face.

I chuckled again and replied, “Oh tu favorito? No, hoy tengo que escribir el periódico para las cajas. Pero no hay nada más para decir sobre las verduras. Qué piensas que debo escribir? Digame, Berta.” *[Oh, your favorite? No, today I have to write the CSA newsletter. But there’s nothing more to say about vegetables. What do you think I should write? Tell me, Berta.]*

“Mm, no sé,” she replied quietly. “Solo soy una trabajadora.” *[Mm, I don’t know. I am just a worker.]*

“Usted es una reina,” *[You are a queen,]* I replied defensively. I thought I saw her crack a tiny smile, but she said nothing.

Everyone had finished up all the twist ties and were starting to load up the truck with the harvest. As Berta and I walked toward the truck together with our full totes, she suddenly yelled out, “Oh! Laurita, puedes preguntar a los patrones de mi cheque? Es que yo trabajé seis días cada semana pero solo está para cinco.” *[Oh! Laurita, can you ask the owners about my check? I worked six days a week but it’s only for five.]*

“Oh no! Sí, sí, claro. Solo es la machina nueva, los mujeres en la oficina están diciendo todo el tiempo que no sirve. Ellas necesitan decir a todos que deben recordar sus horas para ser seguro. Voy a hablar con ellas hoy.” *[Oh no! Yes, yes, of course. It’s just the new machine, the women in the office are saying all the time that it doesn’t work. They need to tell everyone to record their hours to be sure. I’ll talk to them today.]*

“Ok, bueno. Gracias. Muchas gracias, Laurita. Gracias.” *[Okay, good. Thank you. Thank you so much, Laurita. Thank you.]*

“Claro, Berta, no problema, de verdad,” *[Of course, Berta, no problem, really,]* I replied, looking up and seeing the concern in her face. The rest of the crew began loading up into the crew van to harvest something else in some other field, but Berta hesitated before returning to them.

“Es que, todavía estoy trabajando dos días cada semana para gratis con el gobierno robando mi dinero. No puedo perder más. Ay, Laurita, estas cosas son difíciles.” *[It’s just that, I am already*

working two days a week for free with the government stealing my money. I can't lose more. Ay, Laurita, these things are hard.]

"Entiendo, Berta, es puro paja. Lo siento que el mundo es así," *[I understand, Berta, it's bull shit. I'm sorry the world is this way.]* I said defeated, knowing that I don't really understand, feeling broken and hopeless and dripping with privilege.

"No digas 'lo siento,' Laurita, no es tu culpa. No digas 'lo siento'." *[Don't say 'sorry,' Laurita, it's not your fault. Don't say 'sorry.']*

"OK, Berta, no voy a decir 'lo siento.' Ahora pues, tengo que salir con los escallions. Hasta lunche?" *[Ok, Berta, I won't say I'm sorry. Alright, I have to leave with the scallions. See you at lunch?]* I asked as I hopped onto the back of the flatbed with the rest of my scallion brethren.

"Sí, venga, tengo una sopa con las verdolagas de ayer. Venga. Ahora pues, te amo, Laurita. Venga para lunche," *[Yes, come, I have soup with the purslane from yesterday. Come. Alright, I love you Laurita. Come for lunch,]* she said behind her as she jogged to join the rest of the crew.

I yelled after her cupping my hands around my mouth like a microphone, "Qué rico! Te amo también, Berta! Hasta lunche!" *[I love you too! See you at lunch!]* The truck jolted forward and my hands quickly found nooks to grip just as Berta disappeared into the van.

Needless to say, or perhaps not, Berta and I have two very different experiences as actors within the local food movement. I studied Spanish and English throughout high school and college. She speaks an indigenous language as well as Spanish but cannot read or write either well. The farm is my life, my home, my platform, but for her it is little more than a paycheck. I chose to work at the farm. She is here because she has no choice.

My hands tightened their grip on the edge of the truck as it lurched again, struggling into second gear before turning into the parking lot. Our packing shed has an attached farmstand and restaurant that serves "modern European peasant cuisine," complete with an earth oven, freshly-made potato doughnuts, and a wooden dining deck lined with glass walls that overlooks the flower garden. It is a most beloved destination for both tourists and locals.

The driver brought the big truck to a halt to let a group of older folks with bright white hair cross. They meandered slowly from their Prius to the stone steps that led up into the restaurant and looked over at me. *Oh look*, they must have thought, in a whiny, nasally voice, *isn't that beautiful! Young farmers bringing in the vegetables straight from the field. How very farm to table.* They saw me, the white girl in rubber boots, sun glasses, and a floppy sun hat floating in a sea of scallion tops jutting up into the sky. They saw the driver, another white girl with botanical arm tats and thick turquoise bangles, bequeathed with the mantle of proper state licensure. But they didn't know that they weren't seeing Berta.

After the driver backed the truck up to the packing shed edge, I hopped down and sprayed the mud off the bottom of my boots one foot at a time. Making my way to the office, I noticed my friends standing toward the middle of the packing shed, only today, I just saw them as two white men, holding coffees and clipboards. One is the farm's business manager, the other runs cultivation. As I got closer I could hear that they were lamenting the latest and greatest Trump tweet.

I used to jump at every opportunity I could get to chat up those cool cats, to talk with people who loved to nerd out on the botany of brassicas and the politics of parsnips. But today I'd really just rather save up my words for Berta at lunchtime. The farm serves us all breakfast and lunch every day, a unique benefit that is so generous and beautifully human. I used to think it was flawless. But if I were to pay attention to more than just myself, I would notice that many of the farm's Latinx employees do not actually care for the "American" foods provided to appease the values of the white foodies who work here. They regularly and silently retreat out of view to their locker room and prefer to heat up leftover tortillas y sopas y frijoles there, rather than sit with the English-speakers out in the open dining area. But when a new lunch chef was hired who, heaven forbid, served us pre-made potato salad and pastries from Safeway, the uproar from the foodies was so loud that management talked with her about needing to source healthier ingredients.

I meet Berta in the locker room and have lunch with her often. I think she takes joy in cooking for people, and I love eating her amazing food and hearing her stories of life in her pueblo. I'm

amazed by her. Yet having lunch with Berta is also problematic. When I'm in that little locker room usually I feel more than welcome, but sometimes I feel paranoid. Like, if they didn't want me there they would have no autonomy to do anything about it and I would never know. White girl comes and sits down in their private space, where they can be with their friends and talk in Spanish or Mum and not be in a white space for just a half an hour? Even now I say "their" as if there is a monolithic Latinx experience at the farm, as if they are not all individuals who would have their own opinions about me sitting in that space with Berta. I think honestly they couldn't care less. I don't know. Am I just as ignorant of my privileges as those two men getting paid higher wages to stand still and hold coffees as brown bodies scramble around them?

And yet, am I taking this all too far? I know those men. They are my good friends. One was an anthropology major, the other was married to one. They do a lot of very difficult work at the farm that not many other people could do and are quite intelligent and caring. Perhaps they had worked through their break earlier and were only just now taking a moment and I am just being an uppity piece of shit.

But the reality is, I don't really know. Many of us do not yet have the tools to talk or even think about privilege and "soft" racism. Even as I open up to you here, I have so much fear. Even after studying these issues through an anthropological lens at the university, I am still unsatisfied with narrowness of terms such as "American," "Immigrant," and "Latino." We don't use these words at the farm, we just say, "the field crew," our own special term that technically refers to the harvest crew but actually is just a softer term than "the Latinos." I feel frozen in silence, aware of the narrowness of my own perspective, knowing that even now I am likely thinking about all this precisely backwards. I am worried that my clever title may very well imply that I mean to say that immigrants are like elephants in some way, the object of discussion rather than the sovereign actor that has yet to be included on stage. Even though I had help editing, I am worried about the Spanish dialogue that I typed because I am not a native speaker. To be quite honest, I do not know exactly what I am doing. I just know that something needs to be done. And that, my fellow locavores, is a very dangerous place to be when dealing with a vulnerable population. Welcome to the problematique of local food.

I continued on through the packing shed, past the walk-in cooler full of pallets waiting to go to high-end restaurants, and through to the hand-washing sink behind the restaurant's bakery. I looked over at the racks of pear galettes and pain au chocolat and thought of the countless times that the pastry chef would offer me a special treat, or how I see those men in management go into the kitchen and just take what they want. As I scrubbed the dirt off my hands I thought about how Berta has likely never been offered one of these fine desserts and how she would certainly never take one without permission. And yet, my refusal to eat one now out of some sort of solidarity is a farce that could only possibly result in me feeling slightly less guilty for being privileged. It helps no one. Guilt is not the goal.

I dried my hands, walked past the pastries, and turned the corner to go up the stairs. Just a few steps up I caught a glimpse of the farm's new employee board and my body stopped mid hop. A cork board about two feet tall and three feet wide displayed head shots of the current on-farm employees, separated into crew categories: Field, Packing Shed, Seed & Irrigation, Farmstand, Office, etc. As you moved from one side to the other, one thing was clear. There was a stark juxtaposition from field to office, from farm to table, from brown faces to white.

Feeling like I had been standing there too long, I turned away and booked it up the remaining stairs two steps at a time. I tried to ignore the sign on the door at the top of the staircase that read "PRIVATE PROPERTY" and pushed through it. In the event of an ICE raid, a warrant would be needed to enter the room. Closing the door behind me, I greeted the office workers and got settled into my desk as they told me all about how boring it had been up there all day and how I should take a look at this new music video that they had just cued up. Nowhere near in the mood, I sat down at my desk and told them I needed to get my newsletter written before lunch.

As I sit upstairs in this toasty office today, above all the workers bustling about in the cold, muddy fields, about to represent the farm to the public once again, about to reproduce whiteness and oppress people of color via omission as I write about how excited "we" all are for sunchokes to be making their seasonal debut this week, I know that I just can't do it. When I write for the farm, I am always saying "we" but it isn't true. I could tell you about how much "we" love sunchokes for their rich umami flavor and artichoke-like tang, but that "we" does not

include Berta. You know what sunchokes are to the field crew? Sunchokes, pronounced “*Sancho*,” is the man who’s at home sleeping with your wife while you’re at work. You know what Green Oak Compact is to the field crew? Fucking lechuga [*lettuce*].

I don’t mean to imply that the migrant workers I work with don’t appreciate the nuances of produce varieties—on the contrary, the amount of knowledge of culturally-significant crops held by my coworkers is nothing short of impressive. This isn’t about that. This is about how these newsletters are supposed to provide our customers with a heartfelt narrative that connects them to what’s going on at the farm, and they don’t.

Scrolling through my newsletters from over the years, I see dozens of clever and corny alliterative titles and inspirational metaphors about life gleaned from working closely with plants. I remember that I felt like I was achieving my food writer goals when CSA customers would call or email in telling me about how they looked forward to the newsletters just as much as the produce itself, how they were moved to tears, how they feel so grateful to be able to support such amazing farmers. I felt like I was channeling my inner Michael Pollan. I felt like I was really making a difference in the world. And in reality, I was, and obviously so is Michael Pollan. But neither of us are making any difference in the lives of the incredible migrant and seasonal farmworkers who remain the backbone of our local food movements, except of course, by further oppressing them by never recognizing that they exist.

So, it’s not actually that I don’t know what to write anymore, it’s that I know I can’t write what I want to write. I want to write about how Latinx immigrant farmworkers are completely left out of local food movements despite being the leading labor force that supports them. I want you to know that even though they participated in local food activities in their home countries they do not participate in them here because of the barriers they face that are largely a result of this movement’s historically white shortcomings. I want to explode the assumption that Certified Organic implies something about social justice when it is in fact just a regulation on soil inputs and crop sprays.

People understand that there are major infringements on social justice within conventional agriculture, even within conventional organic. People even get that local organic fare is socioeconomically exclusive and that something must be done to lower the cost of good food. People get that. But nobody in my local food movement really understands that all their favorite local organic farms that dominate their farmers market still depend on largely segregated Latinx immigrant labor. And yes, life on a small-scale organic farm is much “better” than on conventional farms. Truth. But the vulnerabilities are still there. The power disparities are still there. Whiteness and racism are both still being reproduced. And yet, this is only just being acknowledged by academics and almost never discussed by farmers and foodies themselves.

But I can’t just come out and say that. I cannot make some grand statement from a major local farm on social media about our vulnerable employees without inherently making them more vulnerable. Moreover, it is not my place to talk “about” anyone. But even if I could, some of you wouldn’t want to hear it. When I write about food for a local organic farm that serves a broad audience, I have to keep things relatively light. I can’t get too political or even too botanical without losing people. But really, I’m already framing the situation entirely wrong. I’m sitting here asking myself, what should I write in this newsletter? But I am not the voice that needs to be heard.

I may not be the person with all the answers, but I am a person who knows that we need to start trying to come up with some. In Eric-Holt Giménez’ latest book, *A Foodie’s Guide to Capitalism*, he explains how our food system functions by extracting wealth from both the environment *and* from labor (Holt-Giménez 2017). And yet the discourse around local food is all about bringing value to the environment and never about valuing immigrant labor. What would the world look like if foodies and farmers valued a social justice certification as highly as organic? What would my local farming community be like if the immigrant voices that supported them were leading the way?

But before we get too excited about how to start “helping” to bridge this gap from immigrant to table, a trap I fall into on the daily, let’s not. Indigenous Australian activist Lilla Watson speaks to this issue when she famously said,

“If you have come here to help me, you are wasting your time. But if you have come because your liberation is bound up with mine, then let us work together,” (Watson 2012).

The way we move forward matters and keeping our balance will be a continuous struggle. I am still in love with produce. But this isn’t even about that anymore. It’s not about maximizing the warm fuzzy feels that I get when I commune with the soil or with customers at market. It’s not about me. This is about the migrant farmworkers in my local farming community who continue to be oppressed and forgotten even by the supposedly woke ethical consumers who they feed.

This is about how even local organic farmers do not understand their labor force in full context and have never been expected to. This is about how I got a bachelor’s in sustainable farming without taking one class on migrant issues. This is about how foodies at market ask about what sprays we use and what heirloom tomato varieties we have, and not about who we employ. This is about how the power of the word Organic has become so complete that we can no longer see a reason to question its limits. This is about a conversation that is not happening between people who do not know each other.



Introduction

We love our local food systems. We love moseying through the crowded isles of the farmers market, booths overflowing with seasonal abundance. We love coming home with beautiful, delicious produce and preparing wholesome meals for our families and friends who appreciate the value of the meal being shared. We live in a world where we all have our favorite cozy farm-to-table brunch spots that serve deep gold free-range yolks dripping down onto a bed of well-dressed chicories with a side of artisanal avocado barley toast that's so rich and flavorful and yet somehow actually fluffy.

We love all of that. It's heavenly. There's a lot to celebrate. Our experiences with our local food systems are likely some of the most real, human experiences throughout our day. And in the face of industrial agriculture and a president that was once described as a horse loose in a hospital (Mulaney 2018), our local food systems are a saving grace. They work successfully toward mitigating environmental exploitation, cultivating and strengthening our local communities, and providing quality food that doesn't contribute to the epidemic of diet-related disease. They are our escape from all that is wrong in this world. Everything might be going to shit out there, but over here I've got the first fresh Oregon tomatoes of summer sliced up with some mozz that my friend brought over and I have a little glass of basil on my counter and an Oregon fig balsamic that I got at the amazing oil and vinegar store on the coast just for this occasion, so... I think it's all going to be fine, right?

Isn't that kind of how we feel about going for a hike? Or going camping or working in a garden? We preserve these pure little islands of nature to go inside and rejuvenate our souls so that we're strong the rest of the time that we have to be a part of the fast-paced industrial world. But we sort of understand the land sparing conservation debate. We get why just preserving these little islands of green will not be enough in the long run, and so we locavores take strong political action against climate change and urban sprawl. We still walk through the forest with our dogs and appreciate every whiff of pine and every lock of Old Man's Beard, but we tend to

have a more complicated relationship with the forest or the river that extends beyond our enjoyment of it and leads to political action. We need that in our farm-to-table utopia.

Like any lusty romance, our relationship with our local food systems is ripe for complication. First and foremost, on local farms and at the farmers market, all we ever really talk about or value are environmental health and our own individual health—we ask around at the market if things are certified organically grown because of what that means for our bodies and for the environment. But we rarely ever even think to think to ask about a farm's worker justice certification, union participation, or the general health and wellbeing of the migrant workers who actually make our local food systems run. But wait—migrant workers only work on industrial farms, right? Not right.

We don't mosey about the farmers market aware of the fact that the biggest and most popular booths rely on harvest crews of largely segregated Latinx migrant workers. We tend to assume that our favorite local small farms surely don't hire migrant labor at all. We don't ask questions about labor standing in front of a gorgeous produce display. We ask which heirloom tomato variety would be best in a caprese salad. And in general, we sort of assume that everyone who participates in local food systems feels all the same warm fuzzy vibes that we do and have never had a reason to imagine why that wouldn't be the case. And we certainly haven't thought about voting on immigration reform as a core element of our locavore identity.

In this radical navigation, I'm really asking a lot of you. I'm inviting you to face our blind spots head on and remain humble. I'm asking you to read words that challenge you rather than lure you in with pleasure. I'm then going to ask you to do more than you were doing in your life before. There is much we do not know. We see our food systems from our perspectives, and we don't know about the perspectives and voices who don't have the agency to participate in the conversation, even the ones who are responsible for making our local food systems possible.

In this navigation, we will explore some of the most significant ways in which our perceptions of local food systems have been framed and develop an eye for noticing the fault lines that lay just beneath our awareness. Bringing migrant perspectives into focus is needed for locavores to

understand that our experience in our local food systems is not shared throughout the food chain, and that perhaps there is more that is required of us ethical consumers than just ethical consumption. As described in *The No-Nonsense Guide to International Migration*, despite the fact that migrants only compose 3% of the world population (Stalker 2008),

“[migrants] generate controversy and debate out of all proportion to their modest numbers, largely because as they travel, migrants expose many of the social and political fault lines—of race, gender, social class, culture and religion—that underlie the seemingly settled terrain of modern nation states. To ask about the rights of immigrants is to re-open many awkward questions.”

Discussing the role of migrant labor in our local food discourse exposes a plethora of social and political fault lines in the seemingly settled waters of our local food systems. To complicate our understanding of our local food systems in this way is to re-open many awkward questions indeed, important questions that are increasingly being asked all around the world by those who have been marginalized and silenced by the systems that we have in place. These questions can be easier for locavores to ask of industrial or corporate entities, but harder to face when analyzing our favorite farm-to-table brunch spots, and harder yet to face the vulnerability, confusion, and humility in posing these questions to ourselves. It’s quite personal on the interpersonal level. That’s why it’s so awkward.

In the academic literature, the dirty laundry of our local food systems is hung out and ready to dry. But on local small farms, at the farmers market, and in state agriculture curriculums in the Willamette Valley, the awareness of the severity of the structural problems that have yet to be addressed is only just permeating the periphery. To the majority of locavores, the role of migrant labor in their local food systems is simply an unknown unknown.

Navigating the fault lines within local food discourse will show us how mainstream local food systems are thinking and acting with regard to addressing structural problems. Discourse includes the questions that we ask at the farmers market, the things that we value about the local products that we purchase, the articles and social media posts that we love for promoting

values like #farmlife, #eatlocal, and #eatorganic. It's the ways that we talk about, read about, write about, and think about our local food systems, and the ways that we don't. Moreover, it's about who's a part of those conversations and who is not.

To contextualize this navigation, Eric Holt-Giménez, executive director of Food First and agroecologist-author extraordinaire, helps us to see that food movements across the world tend to fall under two categories—progressive and radical (Holt-Giménez 2017). Radical food movements tend to address the very structural issues around racism, agency, and power dynamics that progressive movements do not, despite both movements' devotion to agroecologically produced local food and individual health. Progressive movements tend to have more of a food *justice* orientation, whereas radical food movements fully encompass food *sovereignty*, which takes past and present structural racism and inequity into full consideration.

In the Willamette Valley, local food movements are far more progressive than they are radical, and we're going to explore three major arenas of our local food discourse that each exist in different places on the progressive to radical spectrum. In the first chapter, we'll explore the radical local food discourse that has been happening over the past twenty years in academia, and explore why it is that certain critiques that are so yesterday continue to be news to locavores on the ground today. What's inhibiting radical thought and action from penetrating the mainstream local food movement?

After looking at radical academic food discourse and how it has not been historically adopted or absorbed by locavore masses in general, our exploration in chapter two will take a look at the local food discourse being produced currently on the ground by local farms, farmers markets, the local media, and state agriculture organizations in the Willamette Valley. Spoiler alert—discourse most often occurs as if migrant labor didn't exist in local food systems at all, while some publications that actually do focus on labor only refer to it as a financial challenge for farm owners, or a dwindling resource in a tight labor market (Waterbury 2019).

Yet there is a radical fringe of actors within our local food system who are on the radical edge of local food discourse on the ground. They are radicalizing the discourse that they produce, and

tend to have smaller, more radical audiences already. We will explore how radical thought was brought to and received by Portland's food scene on the Farming While Black 2019 book tour, and how radical thought was confined to some rooms and not others at the 2019 Small Farm Conference at Oregon State.

The third chapter will draw from my work as an on-farm writer in radicalizing local food discourse production at Oregon Organics Farm over the 2018 season, both on social media and in person at the Portland State farmers market. Producing radical discourse for OOF's audience has its own unique opportunities and limitations. As the audience is far broader than that of local food actors who are already engaging in producing radical local food discourse, a more delicately balanced rate of radicalization felt necessary to employ for the sake of efficacy.

This work was largely in the form of written blog posts, social media posts, farmers market signage, and CSA Newsletters. The section is told through a series of stories that outline the trajectory of my radicalization process. First, in the story you just read, *The Immigrant in the Room*, I invited the locavore to join me on the journey into realizing that there are people in our local food communities who we didn't know were there, people who do not experience our local food systems the same way that locavores do, and that we need to do something about it (Bennett 2019). In the third chapter I continue the story by in a more analytical narrative exploring the series of gently radical pieces that I started putting out.

I end with the story of how the 2018 midterm elections and an inspiring classmate catalyzed the first truly radical piece of local food discourse production that called on locavores to move beyond voting with their forks and take political action by actually voting on a measure that affects all migrant fieldworkers in Oregon. The post elicited an array of reactions from OOF's audience, including one comment that birthed another twelve on its own that read, "I love your produce but can't we even keep vegetables out of politics?"

The first response was an accurate, quick, and cathartic come back, which later diverged into personal attacks and locavore-on-locavore shaming. This no-vegetables-in-politics comment and the differing public reactions to it serve as an excellent point of departure from which to

discuss the ways that locavores talk to each other on the radical edge of local food discourse. In light of the search for common ground, we can explore alternatives to negative oppositional politics that enable collective sovereignty rather than compromise it (Slocum 2006).

Knowing that radical food discourse has become the norm in academia but not in individual locavore lives, analyzing our local food discourse can start to provide us with a better understanding of the barriers to radicalization. At the population level, radicalization appears to be inhibited by oversimplified dichotomies that fuel our ignorance. But on the individual level, radicalization seems to be inhibited by unfamiliar or uncomfortable social dynamics and personal reflection along the way. The way that we talk to each other on the edge of radical local food discourse can be a major barrier to forwarding radical thought and action, and therefore inhibiting collective structural change.

Once we've seen how difficult and problematic the road toward radicalization can be in our local food discourse, we'll be ready to tackle what radicalization can look like on our local small farms. This chapter draws largely from my fieldwork at a prominent local small farm in the Willamette Valley, one of the top three organic produce vendors at the Portland Farmers Market, which is often listed among the top ten markets in the country.

The first section introduces Oregon Organics Farm and contextualizes its position within the local food community in the Willamette Valley. We'll go through the history of the farm, not as it has been told dozens of times in interviews and articles, but as the beginning of writing migrant workers back into the narrative. Further work is needed to incorporate migrant voices into this narrative. Our exploration focuses on the status of radical thought on farm over time.

Next, we'll take a deep dive into just how complicated racial issues of voice and agency and whiteness can be even in a single meal at the farm cooked by an Indigenous woman that must satisfy the tastes and values of both white locavores and migrant farmworkers. As an employee myself, farm lunch was the first place where I started becoming aware of race- and class-based inequalities and power dynamics which inspired me to do the research for the previous chapters. I find that when I am talking about these issues with locavores who are new to all of

these concepts, talking about how power dynamics and issues of voice and agency play out in the farm lunch setting works well to introduce the complexity of the issue.

The following section takes a step back from Oregon Organics Farm to provide a broader analysis of the ways in which our local food spaces reproduce whiteness and racialization. This section pulls heavily from Rachel Slocum's *Whiteness, Space and Alternative Food Practice*.

With a better understanding of white spaces in local food systems, the fifth section jumps back on farm and offers up a different story of Oregon Organics Farm, pulling from my interviews with the farm owners to show the history of migrant labor at OOF and how radical awareness has developed on farm throughout time, just as it is in our local food systems at large.

Chapter five highlights this radicalization process during the pivotal 2018 season on the women's crew in the fields. This was the first season in thirty years that the historically segregated Latinx migrant field crew was both integrated with white US-born locavores and segregated by gender. The benefits and limitations of the mixing of bodies is explored, giving way to the conclusion that a more radical and rigorous approach to dismantling structural problems on our local small farms, in our food systems, and beyond is needed.

The conclusion explores some of the grander implications of forming worker-consumer alliances and addressing the awkward and problematic position that locavores now find themselves in. With immigration in the national spotlight, environmental chaos ensuing, and a growing consumer base of local farming systems, alliances within local food communities have the potential to stand up to political power and push for real, strong, structural change.

Individuals have so much power if only it is wielded properly and built on common ground.



Methods

I spent the summer of 2018 working on the women's crew on a local organic farm, although I had worked on the crew a couple summers before and had existing relationships with many of my Latinx coworkers and my US-born coworkers, as well as a general familiarity with the place. As one of the few bilingual women and one of the longest-standing employees on the crew, I had a particularly enlightening vantage point from which to observe and experience the rocky radicalization unfolding around me and within me, each insight revealing new blind spots.

I started working at Oregon Organics Farm in 2012 and I have yet to stop. I was seventeen and it was my first real job after a rather sedentary childhood in apartments. I had moved down to Corvallis from Portland to study Horticulture at the university and spent the summer before school working at the farm. I spent my first two years working in the packing shed, learning how to wash, pack, and grade hundreds of different varieties of vegetables. In the packing shed, I worked under one of the owners and two female Latinx managers. We talked a lot over the washing sinks and helped each other with our English and Spanish a bit, but outside of work I only ever spent time with my US-born coworkers. Curious about other areas of the farm, I started working on other crews my third year there.

Over the years that I have been at the farm, I have spent time in the propagation greenhouse, on the Latinx field crew, out at the farmers market, up in the office, and in the kitchen. I've managed and expanded our food processing capabilities to close the waste gap and provide wholesale frozen and fermented products to grocery stores and restaurants. I've helped to develop successful microgreen production systems that top plates at the high-end restaurants of Portland. I've driven freight liners to the farmers market and managed the construction of produce displays, product pricing, and employee training. In the past few years I have become the farm's writer, authoring everything from CSA newsletters to menu blurbs to market memos and social media posts. I've even made farm lunch for the entire crew in the heat of the season a handful of times.

I am personally grateful for working at a place that has allowed me to experiment and flourish wherever I so chose, and that I've continued to be supported throughout this research. I started becoming aware of the structural problems on farm in a particularly active way during my fifth season at OOF. I had graduated with a Bachelor of Science in horticulture and was working my first full year at the farm through the winter, during which time I lived on the farm for a bit. I started noticing things that I never really noticed before, and I couldn't un-notice them.

As we saw in the *Immigrant in the Room* and the Introduction, I entered into the exploration of the radical fault lines in my local food community because I was already experiencing them. Working in the fields with migrant women on a prominent local small farm opened my eyes to the limited nature of my experiences and perspectives of the local food system as a mainstream locavore. I started to notice power dynamics and issues of voice and agency for the first time and felt that locavores needed to be doing more to support the hands that feed. With a critical eye, I took my curiosity into academia to learn more about the system that I thought I knew.

As an Environmental Arts and Humanities student, my work aims to help usher the world into a more sustainable direction through interdisciplinary scholarship and action. With my feet firmly rooted in the Willamette Valley local food community—on farm, at market, at public events, and on social media—I am able to actionably experience and reproduce that which I study. With my hands exploring these familiar spaces through unfamiliar scholarly disciplines, I can begin to see that which I've been blind to. With my heart firmly focused on structural changes beyond food required for collective sovereignty, I aim to learn how better locavores can enable that shift by exploring how locavores experience local food spaces on the edge of radicalization. In addition, I sought to understand more about the migrant farmworker experience on farm and learn how it differs in voice and agency from the locavore experience of the same system.

I largely pull from anthropological methods for my research and analysis, which comes largely in the form of storytelling, while the actual written work itself requires an understanding of environmental rhetoric to both analyze current local food discourse and alter discourse production myself. Although I do not necessarily tend to write like an anthropologist, I aim to view the world through an anthropological lens and to utilize the anthropologist's tools to dig

up insights. This thesis is written the same way that I would write a CSA newsletter for the farm—from one locavore to another, in an honest, engaging way that leads the reader through new ideas via story intermixed with analysis and ethnography. The version of reality that I have represented is intimately tied to my own perceptions and perspectives, and exists alongside endless realities that that I both consciously and subconsciously excluded (Bernard 2011).

Ethnographic Methods

The majority of my thesis is supported by in-depth participant observation and descriptive field notes. I was a participant observer in fields I had already worked in, at the markets I already attended, on social media platforms I already ran, and at some of the same public local food events that I had already been exposed to. Only now I was paying attention to different things. I took notes on the changes being made on farm throughout the season by management in attempt to address issues on the field crew and promote a better work place environment. I took note on how my diversified group of coworkers participated in, responded to, and processed these changes and interacted with each other accordingly. This included observations of racialized behavior, value statements, passing comments, and especially, interactions between women on the crew. These interactions exist within the on-farm dichotomy of *las chicas americanas y las hispanas*, but there is no monolithic experience or expression on either side. If the mixing of bodies can create circumstances that can “make or unmake hegemony,” what would that look like and feel like (Slocum 2006)?

Through conversing with all of my coworkers on the women’s crew and with management throughout the season every day, I was able to see how the edge of radicalization was affecting and being navigated by many different people holding many different perspectives. I worked at this farm for five years prior to my graduate studies. From September 2017 to June 2018 I visited the farm 3-5 times a week and shared meals with my coworkers, doing some interviews. From June to September of 2018 I worked on farm in the fields on the women’s crew about forty hours a week, capping each week off with a fifteen-hour day working the PSU farmers market. From September 2018 to June 2019, I took a writing hiatus and returned to the farm to talk with the women I worked with and management more sparingly.

During field transitions and meal breaks, I typed quick field notes on my phone using the Evernote app, and followed up each evening at home on my computer's version of the app to fill in the outline I created throughout the day in more detail. I also recorded the task transitions throughout the day, always noting when a conversation happened in the cilantro patch or the cherry tomato house, aiming to incorporate place-based details into the story and develop a sense of chronology in the process of radicalization throughout the season.

Participant observation allows a much more in-depth understanding of the context in which this work exists. Due to my existing relationships and familiarity both with the spaces I was in and the people I was with, my fellow coworkers and locavores were more open and honest regarding their experiences. The familiarity I have with the interpersonal contexts on farm and with the farm itself still do not make me an authority by any means (Bernard 2011), but it offers me a more accurate and diverse understanding of the experience and process of radicalization.

In addition to taking notes on farm, I also took heavy note of local food discourse in the Willamette Valley at the PSU farmers market, on social media and at local food events. Also, Photography was a supplemental method to capture the reality of life on farm, in addition to providing place-based details. All people in photographs included in this thesis have given verbal consent to use the images.

In addition to many informal interviews that took place in the form of in-field conversation, I collected a small handful of semi-structured interviews that were audio-recorded, as well as one employee workshop held on-farm. I obtained verbal consent for all recorded interviews. After heat season, I returned to the fields on occasion to further explore my emergent findings and themes; these informal interviews helped to reinforce the validity of this work. Due to the limited scope of studying a single farm, the name of the farm and all characters included in this thesis have been changed to respect the privacy of all those involved. This work has been approved by the Institutional Review Board as non-research for its journalistic, story-telling nature reminiscent of oral history rather than anthropological research.

Rhetorical Research

In order to study local food discourse in a variety of venues—on farm, at market, and online—I took endless field notes on the discourse simply being produced around me since I live inside the Willamette Valley local food community. Researching the effect that radicalizing discourse I produced for the farm included digging deep into the farm’s social media insights to view locavore engagement more quantitatively. These insights are compiled in a table in the appendix, in addition to some other discourse research as well. Mostly, just as I did in the field, I jotted down passing comments from fellow locavores throughout my research, relating to migrant labor, environmental values, and social justice in general.

Analysis

My analysis exists within my own personal process of radicalization, deeply bound to my personal experiences and perspectives. My focus varied widely throughout the research process through conversations and analytical field notes. I did not use a traditional anthropological coding process to highlight emergent themes, although I did heavily utilize tagging on my field notes in Evernote to monitor emergent themes. For me, the process of writing is what reveals lessons, and the product is therefore a highly individualized one. The analysis that I offer is surely my own, although it seeks to include the perspectives of others. I transcribed interviews via Transcribe.com to explore the stories of my interviewees.

Language Barriers

Throughout this thesis, I utilize Spanish text, which is italicized. Because I am not fluent in Spanish, this text has been checked by a native speaker who also works on the farm. In some instances, words may seem off but are chosen for a reason. For example, in *The Immigrant in the Room*, I use the word *escallions* in my dialogue with Berta. This is not a “real” Spanish word, but it is the Spanglish reality for the farmworkers I work with. I tried to respect and use the discourse used on farm. Other times, words may seem off because I actually made a fumble.

In addition to having a native speaker edit through this text, there were also often native speakers translating in the field or in meeting spaces. Even though I served as a bilingual translator in the field, there are many nuances that I do not catch. My capabilities are limited. I certainly would not have gleaned many of the insights I present in this thesis without their on-the-spot translation, particularly at the communication workshop. It must be understood that before my insights even reach me they've often already undergone a process of translation, which can alter the message slightly or not so slightly.

To make matters messier, many of the women I worked with spoke Indigenous languages and Spanish was their second language as well. It wasn't just Spanglish being spoken in the fields, it was Spangteco and Mamglisch. The Spanish text that I use should be viewed with these complexities in mind.

Limitations

Ethnographic methodologies are inherently limited to the perspectives and experiences of the anthropologist, as we've explored. In addition, the nature of a single-community ethnography limits our ability to form generalizations beyond the community itself, even if there are many lessons to be learned that have the potential be applicable beyond. Another limitation of the single-source ethnography is a limited ability to protect anonymity for all those involved. Due to the delicate nature of both the subject matter and the vulnerable people involved, it became imperative to assure anonymity to get consent for my project. Because of this, the name of the farm that I worked at and most all characters explored in this thesis have been altered, save for the few (including myself) who consented the use of their names.

I have the complicated limitations of both the insider and the outsider. As the insider, I am not just an anthropologist or a writer, but simply an employee. I work for the farm that I studied, and it cannot be denied that what I do is colored by what is in the best interest of my employer. Throughout the day, my primary objective was to get the job done and get it done well, and my second objective was my research. The work is undeniably tainted by the power dynamics between myself and the owners of the farm who continue to sign my paychecks. I've done my

best to respect the truths of the work over all else, but these biases and pressures cannot be entirely escaped. Also, because I have strong existing relationships with some people and not others, the distribution of the perspectives I gathered bulks up around those who I am closer with, including both native Spanish speakers and native English speakers.

As the outsider, I wholeheartedly acknowledge the profound effects that my identity had on the work and my emergent findings. I converse comfortably in Spanish and often had native speakers in the field translating, but I inevitably missed nuances in conversation that a native speaker would not have. Although I may have existing relationships with some of the Latinx women I worked with that extend beyond the workplace, and although the Latinx advocate on farm that season is my best friend, I cannot escape the fact that I am not only a white graduate student, but I have been in management at the farm and interact openly with the owners often. A power disparity exists. My work must be viewed critically due to its subjectivity.

I decided against employing standard research methods due to their inability to make space for the messy complexity that reality is known for. Although I acknowledge that they are useful and that future research utilizing more standard research methods would benefit this area of study, “social science is inevitably messy and incomplete in its attempts to describe reality,” (Hammer 2014; Law 2004). What I love about story is its ability to present the mess of reality and sort of just leave it there for the reader to decide how they feel. With story, emergent findings are decided upon through the emotional journey of the reader. I am just a locavore asking questions. This is no more than *my* story.

This was my first attempt at navigating the radical fault lines of our local food systems. This was my first time navigating how to talk about race as a white Oregonian. Despite my many limitations and failures, I am proud of my process and look forward to continuing the learning process in my future work. I know that problematic paradigms are embedded still in the way I am perceiving things now, because I know that as time passes, I always find more that I didn’t see before. My dream is for this work to be the beginning of a very serious conversation in my local food community, knowing that people will point out ways in which I’m going about things in problematic ways that I didn’t see before. That’s how we learn and move forward. That’s

what a radical discourse looks like. But we have to start talking. Because we have to start acting.



Chapter I. Radical & Reflexive Local Food Discourse—An Academic Echo Chamber

Introduction

Radical? Reflexive? Discourse? What? Calm down. If we're going to explore our local food systems through the eyes of food scholars, we have to learn a little bit of academic language. We're not going too overboard and using terms such as intersubjectivities, imaginaries, or materialities, which Microsoft Word does not even recognize as real, but the three terms we're looking at are really not so scary and they're quite useful to us.

Discourse is just the way that we talk about things and think about things. Looking at our local food discourse allows us to notice how we talk about local food, what we think about it, what we don't talk about in relation to local food, and who is doing the talking and who's not. Discourse comes in the form of our conversations at the farmers market, our social media posts and those of the local farms and restaurants that we love, and so much more.

"What does *radical* mean?" my professor asked on the first day of a philosophy course on worldviews and environmental values. "Extreme," exclaimed one student. "Against the mainstream," said another. "Over the top," followed a third. Sitting there at the end of my two years of graduate school, I remembered back when that's probably how I would have defined radical too. But now, radical means something else entirely, and it might just be one of the most important words to get to know in a different way.

Radical means going to the root. Radical means addressing the cause of problems, not simply mitigating the symptoms. Radical means recognizing that the leaves and flowers and fruits that you can easily see above the soil exist solely as a result of its root health and soil conditions. If there were ways that our local food systems were just mitigating the symptoms of a broken

food system for a select few, rather than addressing the true causes of that broken system, wouldn't you want to know?

There's a special little ecosystem that few know of called the *rhizosphere*. Infinitely strapped with vast fractalized surface area, the rhizosphere exists in the soil in the space surrounding roots and the majority of healthy and diverse microbial and fungal activity is centralized there. If the roots were the root causes of our broken food system rife with race- and class-based inequalities, then radical food systems, radical food discourse, and radical food activism all take place within the rhizosphere. In this same vein, the majority of diversity and radical activity within our local food systems is centralized in the rhizosphere.

Despite the fact that if you asked the average locavore if they cared about social justice or not they would overwhelmingly say that they did, the dominant population in our local food communities is not particularly diverse and does not engage in much radical activity. Surely, our local food systems work to address the root causes of environmental degradation, however this is only a fraction of the problem. Radical food systems address both environmental exploitation and the exploitation of human beings. Radical food systems understand the inseparability of social and environmental justice. Local food systems who focus solely on environmental and individual health do not take place in the rhizosphere, and they do not sufficiently address the root causes of the ills of our food systems.

Locavores put a lot of effort into their ethical consumption and tend to have the best of intentions yet are not particularly aware of the true efficacy of their actions (efficacy means how effective something actually is at doing what it intends to do). To assess the efficacy of our food systems, our local food discourse, and our local food activism requires a lot of critical thought and self-reflection. This is what is meant by *reflexive*.

Reflexive food discourse does not just include celebration for what we love about our local food systems. Reflexive local food discourse is aware both of the successes and the failures of our local food systems at the same time. Necessarily, reflexive discourse requires embracing cognitive dissonance, which can be quite uncomfortable for very many people.

People at the farmers market— employees, fellow vendors, regular customers, and local chefs—all ask me what I’m studying, and I never really know how to tell them that I essentially study the ways in which our local food communities could do a whole lot more to address social justice concerns. They get a little quiet and avoid eye contact as if to say, “Oh, you criticize what’s wrong with the thing that I have devoted my life’s work to, that I love so much? That’s cool, I guess...” And that’s the thing—I’m asking a lot of people to open up about these issues, straight up. It can take a lot out of us. But this is what being an engaged citizen must do.

I’ve tried to word things differently dozens of times, but it seems no matter how gently and vaguely I put it, people are put off. Members of our local food communities identify so strongly with local food systems that to be reflexive and critique them feels very personal, even like a personal attack. But then there are the few people who light up hearing my words. I watch as a pulse of energy animates their entire bodies as they say something like, “Yes! Oh my god that is so important. That is exactly the conversation that we need to be having right now.” I cannot thank those people enough for keeping me going.

So that’s what we’re talking about. We’re talking about radical and reflexive discourse within our local food systems. And—surprise, surprise—the ways in which it has been limited to academic circles and not very present at all among locavores themselves. Yes, it can be uncomfortable to critique that which we love and that which we identify with so strongly. But for those of us who have the privilege to tune in and out of that discomfort, it’s rather irresponsible to tune out once you’re aware that you can. The following reflexive exploration of the radical fault lines in our local food systems is necessary to begin actually working toward collective food sovereignty for the masses and not just local food bliss for the few.

• • •

[An Omnivore’s Dilemma or Just an Agrarian Dream?](#)

Thirteen years ago, Michael Pollan asked us, “*What should we have for dinner?*” Together, we explored how complicated that question has become through the onslaught of industrial agriculture and we learned to see the plethora of benefits that engaging in our local food

systems brings us and the environment (Pollan 2006a). Pollan's work brought the love of local into the mainstream and has changed the way that we think about our food systems. He continues to be a food writing icon, but nevertheless has tended to be more progressive than radical. His work omits migrant laborer perspectives as well as an awareness of the structural changes needed to address race- and class-based inequalities in our local food communities.

In a more recent interview with Pollan, he openly admits that he didn't pay attention to labor or wage issues until more recently in his career (Dean 2014). But the average locavore is very much still right where *The Omnivore's Dilemma* left us—in alternative bliss. In the interview, although he openly recognizes that he hasn't paid much attention to labor issues, saying "I didn't talk in detail about labor. It was much more from the point of view of the eater than the person behind the counter," (Dean 2014). Yet his understanding remains limited. He's open about this and refers to others with more knowledge. But then he says this,

"If we clean up our act, in any way, we're going to have to pay more at the register. There's a kernel of truth. If you raised the price of wages to people in the food industry to, say, \$15 an hour in fast food, no doubt it would add to prices – although the claims of how much it would add to prices are exaggerated. However, those people would be able to afford more. That's why we need to pay people more so they can afford it. There's a virtuous circle of paying people more so that they can afford better stuff," (Dean 2014).

But this perspective still oddly centers the consumer over the producer or laborer and calls for more equitable consumption rather than addressing structural issues in both production and consumption. As explored in a recent publication from Food and Foodways entitled, *Agrarian dreams and neoliberal futures in life writing of the alternative food movement*, Pollan and writers like him are described as forging "a path toward an alternative food future that threatens to reproduce the very structural problems it purports to address," (Johnston 2016).

Obviously, we all still love Michael Pollan and hope that he keeps writing books forever, because we love to read them and we learn so much. He has been one of the most important actors in our local food movements and we owe him many props. I find it interesting that his

most recent book, *How to Change Your Mind*, moves away from food writing and is working toward complicating and normalizing proper psychedelic usage into the mainstream. In a recent Portland visit from the new food writer-chef-and-Netflix-personality, Samin Nosrat, Samin spoke about her writer mentor Michael Pollan's shift away from food writing. She said that between the two of them, "he was really ready to stop writing about food" (Nosrat 2019).

Of course, I don't know why Pollan didn't want to write about food anymore, I don't know him. I can assume that anyone would tire of the genre they've been glued to for so many years. But of course, I wonder—do you think that somewhere deep inside Pollan knows that he's no longer the voice that our local food systems activists want to hear? We still love him, but he is the privileged white man who knows little of marginalized perspectives, and Samin is the new *New York Times* food columnist who represents multiple beautiful intersectionalities of marginalized groups and identities. Her Portland visit was hosted by The ARK Series, a new platform "created by Beloved Festival and Soul'd Out Productions, that aims to put radical and novel ideas at the forefront," (Nosrat 2019). With our alternative food movement's sudden thirst for radical thought and perspectives, where do writers like Michael Pollan fit anymore?

Even among the top food writers in the nation, there are many essential subsequent shifts in consciousness to be made to arrive at a full understanding of the limitations of their ilk. That's the politically correct way of saying that there's a lot of ignorance among locavores. Structural racism isn't just about what we do and think, it's about what we don't know and what we don't think about. In addition to a lack of awareness of labor issues in our food system, *The Omnivore's Dilemma* and countless works that followed it have reinforced the false steep dichotomy of local and industrial food that keeps the locavore mainstream in ignorant bliss.

The underlying dichotomy that dominates our local food discourse that says that there are two types of agriculture—local/pastoral and industrial/conventional. Industrial agriculture is known for its toxic environmental practices and exploitation of an incredibly vulnerable and often undocumented labor force. Local, organic, or alternative agriculture, on the other hand, is known for its ethically-produced, healthy food that works sustainably with the environment and supports our local communities and economies. This dichotomy leads us to assume that

migrant laborers only work on conventional farms, while promoting the conflation of *local* with *wholesomeness*. In *Labor and the Locavore*, which we'll explore in depth soon, this conflation is referred to as The Local Trap (Gray 2013; Born and Purcell 2006; Purcell 2006). That sense of complete wholesomeness instills the assumption that nothing needs questioning in our local food systems because they are the good to industrial ag's evil. Locavores lack a certain level of self-awareness that begets needed critique.

But just two years before *The Omnivore's Dilemma* was published, food scholar Julie Guthman published the lesser-known *Agrarian Dreams: The Paradox of Organic Farming in the United States*, which not only challenged this dichotomy in an incredibly effective way but was potentially the source from which many of Pollan's concepts were gleaned. In an academic journal article entitled, *Commentary on teaching food: Why I am fed up with Michael Pollan et al.*, Guthman reflects on Pollan's obviously successful works of food writing and laments food writers for their limited understanding of our food systems (Guthman 2007). She says,

"I am fed up with the apolitical conclusions, self-satisfied biographies of food choices, and general disregard for the more complex arguments that scholars of food bring to these topics. In fact, I wonder why our voices – those of us who are deeply engaged in scholarship of food and agriculture – are so absent from these treatises. Do the food writers fear that we might suggest that things might not be so simple, or is it our own inability to get our voices out there?"

Looking on Amazon's Best Sellers Rank for books, *Omnivore's Dilemma* ranks a cool 4,812 thirteen years after its publication, whereas *Agrarian Dreams* ranks 811,413 (Amazon 2019c, 2019d). These numbers reflect which frameworks have been adopted by the general public as well, with most locavores understanding the simpler framework built by food writer Michael Pollan, whereas the more accurately complex analysis offered by food scholar Julie Guthman didn't gain much traction with the general public. Of course, it's not like there's major beef between these authors. Pollan writes a raving review on the back cover of *Agrarian Dreams'* second edition, and in general, all writers on food work in collaboration to paint the full picture.

But Guthman goes on in her commentary to explain how even more radical scholarly food writers like herself that do end up permeating the local mainstream end up being reduced in the public eye to a much more simplified, individualized, and apolitical narrative. She continues, referring to Marion Nestle and Eric Schlosser's muted calls (in *Food Politics* and *Fast Food Nation*, respectively) for political action (Guthman 2004).

Remarkably, even Nestle's concern with industry involvement with food labeling gets trumped by her recurring "eat less" message. And Schlosser's biting exposé of how the fast food industry's success is due in large part to the roll-back of health and safety regulations, decline of real wages, and cities search for tax revenue – all policy issues, is dampened by a rather anemic plea at the end to "have it your way."

This trend among the mainstream locavore to attach to apolitical acts of consumerism rather than addressing the complicated need for political structural change has repeated itself throughout history. Margaret Gray points out to us in *Labor and the Locavore* that after Upton Sinclair wrote *The Jungle* in 1904, exposing the horrific working conditions in Chicago slaughterhouses, a round of legislation passed regarding food safety regulations in slaughterhouses as a consumer concern, and the plight of the low-wage migrant worker was forgotten (Gray 2013). He later lamented,

"I aimed at the public's heart, and by accident I hit it in the stomach."

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What is it about Pollan's work that made it so much easier to adopt than Guthman's? Of course, Pollan's writing is incredibly engaging, and although it offers up much critique of industrial agriculture, the overall sensation for the reader is one of pleasure in connecting with all that is good in our alternative, local food systems. Right off the bat, although *Agrarian Dreams* is written in more accessible and less academic language than most academic works, you don't get the sense that you're going to enjoy the journey you're about to take like you'd enjoy ice cream. You get the sense that there is work to be done, and work's not relaxing. It's a journey

of self-reflection and it's complicated and awkward. We have a lot more to learn about how radical discourse is communicated and accepted by society, but in general, we know that it's easier to read something that makes you happy than something that makes you conflicted or sad, regardless of the way that it's written.

Michael Pollan is well-seasoned in the art of holding back from his soap box until the end of his books, only revealing himself as an expert after being a novice with the reader throughout the journey (Pollan 2006b). Food scholars write to audiences who are generally unimpressed with the novice and require the expert to be present throughout the entire piece of work. Non-academic audiences don't want the expert to tell them what is wrong with them, they need a peer to meet them where they are and guide them. But radical thought isn't generally known for being so soft and gentle. Radical thought is about asserting that change must happen now.

We know that it has been historically difficult for radical food discourse to be adopted by a dominantly progressive locavore mainstream. We've explored a bit of critique already, touching on the local trap dichotomy that narrows our view and on the limitation of consumerism as a mode of addressing race- and class-based inequalities. But what are the major critiques that food scholars have been screaming and that we have, for many reasons, barely heard?

In *Agrarian Dreams: The Paradox of Organic Farming in the United States*, Guthman critically lamented what the organic farming movement had become. She explains how federal rules for organic sent a wave of disappointment through organic farming devotees, as expressed by activist, farmer, and author, Joan Dye Gussow in *Organic Gardening* (Guthman 2004),

"This isn't what we meant. When we said organic, we meant local. We meant healthful. We meant being true to the ecologies of regions. We meant mutually respectful growers and eaters. We meant social justice and equality."

From the beginning, alternative food movements were simplified beyond their intentions. Guthman goes on to describe how disappointed organic farmers saw the federal oversight as a loss, a corporatized oversimplification of a necessarily complicated issue, and their "typical...

agrarianist response” was to retreat from governmental action and be apolitical, anticorporate, and prioritize the power of the individual farmer to fight for himself rather than take collective action. We even see this sentiment in the radical work of Joel Salatin in *Everything I Want to do is Illegal* as he grapples with government bodies meddling in his own local food efforts (Salatin 2007). Guthman reminds us that the agrarian ideal, the love for local, was originally fueled by the highly anti-centralized power that Jeffersonian democracy was known for at the time of its catching on. Through her analysis, we can start to see the roots of why the average locavore holds so strongly onto their own agency as consumers, viewing consumerism as the preferred alternative to making collaborative structural change as an engaged citizen (Guthman 2004).

She further explains that the agrarian ideal and new organic food systems tend to “[support] justice for farmers, [but] perpetuate injustice for farmworkers,” (Guthman 2004). In the most recent edition, she cites the recent research done that shows that labor exploitation is just as likely to occur on a small organic farm as on a large conventional one, as both systems are built upon a historical practice of labor exploitation that have their not-so-distant roots in genocide and slavery. The exploitation of the workers is enabled both on farm and structurally in society, and both are in need of addressing. She points out that many organic farmers pride themselves on the fact that their workers are exposed to less harsh chemicals, however they continue “to replicate the labor conditions found in conventional agriculture,” (Guthman 2004).

Guthman says that she has noticed an increased social justice emphasis being woven into ecological agriculture and that some locavores are reconsidering market-based approaches (ie. voting with your fork) as the best weapon to wield against the structural powers of inequity that be. However, she believes that the public emphasis within local food communities is still largely an effort to build better alternatives for the few rather than bettering the food system of the masses. She considers public policy changes in labor exploitation and land reform as central to future food activism, saying,

“My questions are (a) whether we ought to continue to build near-perfect systems for the few rather than better systems for the many, even if the latter

means farmers practice “organic lite” and (b) whether we can do that without fundamentally changing public policy,” (Guthman 2004).

But it’s not just about changing *what* local food movements focus on, it’s about changing *who* is leading the way. She continues,

“Arguably, only collective action by and for agricultural workers can break the cheap-labor link in the chain—along with a change in border and immigration policy, so the ability of workers to advocate on their own behalf is not systemically subverted. A truly transformative food movement would take on such struggles, and activists would find ways to act in solidarity with workers.”

Overall, I glean two major critiques of our local food systems from Guthman’s incredibly thorough food scholarship. Regarding labor, we can see that even our alternative farming systems continue to exploit marginalized human labor despite valuing the opposite and tend to focus their efforts instead solely on environmental sustainability. Moreover, these workers have little to no voice or agency, even in our local food systems. Regarding the tools of change employed by local food movements, Guthman argues that despite the organic farming movement’s historical distrust of political solutions, the state and the federal governments alone have the capacity to resolve both the major social justice issues and environmental issues that continue to proliferate throughout our food system. Voting with our forks serves to retain agency in the hands of those with more power and avoids making real, structural, political change to the systems that affect the masses.

For the average locavore who performs food activism by shopping at the local co-op or farmers market, who cares deeply about ethical issues and takes pride in partaking in ethical systems, it can be difficult to know how to feel with all these criticisms out on the table. How are we supposed to feel when we shop at the farmers market now? Like any romance, the head-over-heals puppy-dog love phase of our relationship with our local food systems is now becoming more complicated. It’s not that we don’t love all the good things anymore, it’s not that they don’t make us happy, but we’re beginning to understand that we have a lifetime of work still left to do. Blind love no longer has a place in our local food movements.

For the average small organic farmer who has dedicated their whole life to building our local food systems from the ground up, and who has taken the financial brunt of the risk of nature and has somehow kept their head above water despite the horrendously low price of food in this country, these critiques can serve as quite a blow. It's that sensation where you tried your absolute best and you know that it still isn't enough. You are an ethical person who cares deeply for your workers, and now you realize that you still enable their exploitation. It's painful. And for farmers who feel so tired after all these years, it can be difficult to shift their paradigms around so quickly and deal with the emotional tax that comes along with it.

On the ground, on the individual level, I have noticed that these emotional barriers play a large roll in hindering the adoption of more radical understandings of our food systems. The farmers and consumers who have supported our local food systems have done a lot of good work and hold claim to many successes. They deserve to feel proud of what they have accomplished, and the roles that they've played in making our food systems more progressive. But complicating our understanding of what's wrong with our food systems and altering what we focus on within our local food communities are precisely the next steps to take. The work is never done, and the work is never easy. Yet we must figure out how to face it head on nonetheless.

Multiple authors who offer critiques of local food systems put some effort into acknowledging those emotional barriers. Guthman takes care to state that she does not work to discredit organic farms or argue that we shouldn't support them but emphasized the importance of the critical and constant anthropological eye. In *Labor and the Locavore*, Gray did not intend to convince anyone to stop supporting local farms. On the contrary, she promotes the continued and necessary support of local food, but emphasizes the importance of critiquing our local food systems from the perspective of the marginalized workers who continue to be exploited (Gray 2013).

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Migrant Farmworkers and the Local-Industrial Dichotomy

About ten years after *Agrarian Dreams* came out, with labor exploitation and a void of workers' voices continuing to be one of the most pressing and least-addressed issues facing our local food systems, a new wave of works highlighting worker voices and experiences were published. Two of the most relevant publications to our exploration are *Labor and the Locavore: The Making of a Comprehensive Food Ethic* by Margaret Gray which we've already dipped our toes into, and *Fresh Fruit, Broken Bodies: Migrant Farmworkers in the United States* by Seth Holmes.

Although both Holmes and Gray provide incredibly important perspectives of migrant workers that have previously not had a platform from which to speak, they approach the issue from entirely different places just as *Agrarian Dreams* differed from *The Omnivore's Dilemma*. Although Holmes brought the plight of the migrant farmworker into better view, his writing still operated under our simplified agrarian dichotomy. *Fresh Fruit, Broken Bodies* was accepted into society more readily than *Labor and the Locavore* was, with Amazon best seller ratings of 30,332 and 809,129 respectively (see appendix).

Fresh Fruit, Broken Bodies is an excellent ethnography that tells the story of how anthropologist and physician Seth Holmes accompanied migrant workers as they made their perilous journey across the border and through to the fields of our conventional farms. Due to his medical background, a particular emphasis on migrant health issues proliferated throughout. Dolores Huerta of United Farm Workers said herself that Holmes, "*Dramatically portrays the harsh physical and emotional conditions under which farmworkers labor,*" (Holmes 2013). And it's incredible that a story about workers' lives gained as much traction as *Fresh Fruit, Broken Bodies* has.

Holmes continues to explore various solutions to bring an end to labor exploitation. Overall, his tone successfully straddles the delicate line between lyrical and academic and is an easy read as far as ethnographies go. And that is certainly more than can be said about *Labor and the Locavore*, which is one thick academic read. In one review, Holmes' writing is praised for being "accessible and engaging" to non-academic audiences, however his work is critiqued for being

based in the male Triqui experience despite the cover of his book showcasing a Triqui woman in the US farm fields (Rosales 2015). In another review, Holmes' accessible work is critiqued for its "personal, journalistic account of the author's experience... a memoir of research more than analysis," (Griffith 2014).

There is a delicate balance to be found in translating thorough scholarly critique to broader audiences that both Pollan and Holmes strive toward, are commended for, and critiqued for. In an interview with Julie Guthman, she also commends Holmes for his engaging writing which makes him more of a "public intellectual" more accessible to the masses (Guthman 2014). He explains his decision to write to more general audiences further, stating,

"There are times when I want to write in the specific ways used and understood primarily by academics in order to work through and theorize a problem as precisely as possible. However, most of the time, I want to write my theorizations and analyses of the world in ways that will be understandable to publics broader than those working on or having completed doctoral programs in the social sciences and humanities. Honestly, when I am writing, I often find the image of my parents or grandparents automatically in the back of my mind."

In addition to the compliments and critiques of *Fresh Fruit, Broken Bodies*, Holmes' work also inadvertently continues to feed into the dichotomy that migrant workers only work on conventional farms, and that small-scale organic agriculture inherently does not have the same issues, which is precisely what works such as *Agrarian Dreams* and *Labor and the Locavore* seeks to challenge. Many of the issues that are addressed in *Fresh Fruit, Broken Bodies* have largely been resolved on small organic farms who don't expose their workers to as harsh pesticides, but as we know from my ethnography and from *Labor and the Locavore*, there are also a slew of structural problems that continue to proliferate.

It's not that this is written or not written anywhere within *Fresh Fruit, Broken Bodies*. It's just that the book only takes place on conventional farms, and that alone proliferates the idea that migrant workers only work on conventional farms because that's the only setting in which they've heard them discussed. This makes a lot of sense. Gray, along with three other authors,

was interviewed by Gastronomica in a Roundtable Discussion entitled, *Immigrant Labor, Food Politics: A Dialogue between the Authors of Four Recent Books about the Food System*. Two of the books highlight workers' experiences in fruit and vegetable fields, and the other two are staged in slaughterhouses and processing plants (Gray et al. 2017).

All four authors offer amazing insights into the lives of workers in America's food system, and because the American food system consists of predominantly large, industrial farms, it makes sense that that three out of four authors set the scene on industrial farms. Industrial farms dominate, they hire the majority of migrant workers, they have the worst cases of labor exploitation found across the food system, and so it makes sense to highlight worker conditions there with as many giant spotlight beams as possible.

But this has an unfortunate consequence. When the average locavore reads an engaging book like *Fresh Fruit, Broken Bodies* and learns about the conditions under which migrants work on American industrial farms, it often confirms what we already know—industrial farms are terrible, I'll have nothing to do with them, I won't be a part of supporting such inhumane conditions, I'll vote with my dollar over here instead. It's a message we're used to swallowing. Industrial bad, local good. Essentially, all the ethical consumers have responded to exposes of the migrant farmworker experience in the US, rounded themselves up, and abandoned the big broken monster that is industrial agriculture in order to create a pure system that they feel they can ethically support. The dichotomy breeds inaction—a waste of privilege and ethical energy.

This is why it is so essential that *Labor and the Locavore* brings the unique perspective of worker experiences on small scale local farms into the fore. In essence, Gray's message essentially says, you can't walk away from these problems because they're structural and deeply embedded even within all of our food systems, even our beloved local food systems. The experiences had by the migrant farmworkers in Seth Holmes' ethnography are not limited to industrial farms. But even if they were, it doesn't feel right that us ethical consumers get to decide to get up and leave the table when so many others are chained to it.

This is what Julie Guthman was getting at when she wrote *Agrarian Dreams*. Perhaps partially in response to her work, *Labor and the Locavore* is the result of ten years of ethnographic research documenting the challenges faced by both farm workers and farm owners on *local* farms in the Hudson Valley. With so little research done regarding the role and awareness of migrant labor on our local farms, this book picks up where *Agrarian Dreams* left off and serves as the most comprehensive piece of research done at this critical juncture, exploring how labor exploitation plays out on farm and via the state. Julie Guthman herself writes in the leading review on the back of the book saying, “*Labor and the Locavore is a timely and important antidote to much of today’s popular food writing on eating local,*” (Gray 2013).

Gray’s entire body of research rejects the local-industrial dichotomy by relying entirely on worker, farm owner, and food activist testimony solely from local farms and local food events. She confirms that the experience had by workers differs very little between local and industrial farms. She further explores this dichotomy as a general conflation of *local* with *wholesomeness*, which makes labor exploitation in local food systems remain invisible and unexplored (Gray 2013).

But poor working conditions on local farms aren’t just the same as on industrial farms, they are actually exacerbated on local farms in particular ways. Locavores enjoy the close, face-to-face intimacy that they feel with their local farmers through direct-marketing such as what we see at the farmers market. But this intimacy has an inverse reaction on farm that Gray describes as paternalism (Gray 2013).

On local farms, farm owners are often much closer with individual migrant workers than on industrial farms who often work with contractors, which is beneficial and problematic in its own special ways. This personal relationship can become paternalism once elements of the workers’ lives are affected by their boss outside of the working transaction. This can take place when farmers provide workers with housing, help securing cars, help securing citizenship, help accessing resources for workers’ children, etc.

Although these interactions often come from a place of generosity on behalf of the farmers and a place of need on the behalf of the workers, Gray learned from her interviewees that this generosity contributes to worker voicelessness. When asked what it would take for people to speak up about injustices in the workplace, outlining scenario after scenario from pay issues to assault, nearly all the workers said that they would never speak up about an injustice because they get everything from their employers and have no other way to reciprocate than work and behave well, which includes not speaking up. Overall, regardless of whether a farm is classified as either local or industrial, there are not sufficient mechanisms in place for workers' voices to be heard and protected, nor is there an awareness among farm owners that this is lacking.

These unique dynamics between farm owners and farmworkers on local small farms are difficult for all parties to know how to navigate, even those coming from a caring place. In *Moral Boundaries: A Political Argument for an Ethic of Care*, the dangers of care are explored in a section titled Paternalism.

"By its very nature, care is rarely an activity engaged in by equals... There is always implicit in care the danger that those who receive care will lose their autonomy and their sense of independence... [Yet] moral theories are not generally designed to notice inequalities of power," (Tronto 1993).

Because the migrant farmworker experience on local small farms is so engulfed by farm owner interactions, Gray doesn't just look at the challenges facing workers on local farms. She also explores the labor challenges as faced by local farm owners, who despite having played a part in exploiting cheap labor, are also victims of the unregulated Capitalist food systems and are exploited in their own regard, assuming all the financial risk from inclement weather and a system built on cheap food. Gray shows that despite the ways in which farmers are rather unaware of how structural racism and inequity permeates their farms and their selves, the issues facing our food system are multifaceted and cannot be addressed in isolation. Labor exploitation on farm cannot be discussed separately from the labor challenges faced by

farmers, and vice versa, but rather as a collaborative issue defined by the interrelations of migrant workers and local farm owners.

Gray contextualizes the current state of Hudson Valley's local farms by outlining the history of ethnic transition in farmworker populations. To put it quite simply, when white "settlers" came to the New World and caused the genocide that killed nearly all of the indigenous people there, there weren't enough indigenous people left to enslave for farm work. So, they went over to Africa and selectively enslaved people with agricultural knowledge to work the fields in the United States. Because African Americans filled agricultural labor roles, and because racism is embedded in everything in the US and most everywhere else, farm labor positions were excluded from the New Deal and other legislation that provided labor protections and rights granted to nearly every other occupation in the states.

Today, we still have agricultural exemptions from overtime, the 40-hour work week, time off, medical benefits, and much more. And these things are only a fraction of what contributes to labor exploitation, in addition to racist immigration policies and grander political structures such as the North American Free Trade Agreement (Gálvez 2018). To think that we can put a stop to labor exploitation without taking political action and structurally changing our institutions is to not acknowledge the racism and inequity embedded in our world now.

Moreover, Gray outlines how farmers and the state worked together to intentionally force black farm workers out once they started gaining a smidgeon of privilege, while also actively enabling the migration of undocumented Latinos, a more vulnerable group who could be controlled more heavily. Of course, that's not how farmers describe the transition themselves. From their perspective, black workers on their farm started changing, becoming rowdy and violent, and the new undocumented Latinx immigrants possessed a work ethic and demeanor that the owners valued more. Obviously, these points of view are incredibly racist and problematic, and go to show how unaware our local farm owners are regarding the level of structural racism that permeates their industry and their own lives.

Labor and the Locavore concludes by introducing six steps for locavores to take toward building a more comprehensive food ethic that addressed the race- and class-based inequalities in our local food systems and in popular local thought: 1. Educate yourself about farmworker realities, 2. Ask questions about farmworkers at the market, 3. Demand reporting/brochures on farmworkers at local food events, 4. Consider farm labor policy proposals, 5. Be wary of getting lured away from labor policy and structural change, and 6. Buy local! Support local farms to build a food movement that incorporates workers (Gray 2013).

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Local Food Activism & The Limitations of Voting with Your Fork

Gray's six steps are indeed necessary for locavores to adopt a more comprehensive, accurately complicated food ethic in their own lives. I highly recommend all locavores follow them.

However, in a 2017 book, *A New Food Activism: Opposition, Cooperation, and Collective Action*, Julie Guthman is back, along with co-author and sociology professor Alison Hope Alkon. Alkon's "research investigates the intersections between race, class, and sustainable food systems as exemplified in her authorship of *Black, White, and Green: Farmers Markets, Race, and the Green Economy* and in her co-editorship of *Cultivating Food Justice: Race, Class and Sustainability* (Alkon 2014). On the latter publication, Raj Patel, author of *Stuffed and Starved* and *The Value of Nothing* responds (Patel 2019),

"Race, class, and history aren't foodie strong-points. Yet to turn the food movement into one that fully embraces justice, some difficult discussions lie ahead."

It is clear in the academic literature that our local food systems hardly address the structural racism embedded within them. To further this critique, in their new book, Guthman and Alkon point out that Gray's recommendations still do not center *worker* agency as the more pressing issue that needs to be addressed (Alkon and Guthman 2017). Although Holmes' writing builds a more radical picture of our food systems than Pollan, his work is built upon by Gray in *Labor*

and the Locavore which paints an even more radical picture. Yet even Gray's work has room for improvement.

Published fifteen years after *Agrarian Dreams* and building off of it and *Labor and the Locavore*, *A New Food Activism* is an essential guide to the new theories and methodologies to actively apply to our food activism efforts. It is packed full of criticisms unfamiliar to popular local food culture that are crucial to exploring the efficacy of alternative food movements as they exist today, largely through examining "the ways that various food activists confront and move beyond them," (Alkon and Guthman 2017). Knowing that such critiques have historically struggled to escape the academic echo chamber, Guthman and Alkon write,

"Many times, scholars write only for one another. We are proud to be a part of a discourse where this is most certainly not the case. We have had the pleasure of dialoguing about our work with those we've studied, and with those who are doing similar work across the country and around the world. Not only have our critiques been shaped by their perspectives and lived experiences, but we've been pleased to watch as they thoughtfully evaluate and discuss our writings. It's an honor to now be able to write about their efforts to move beyond critiques and debates that, while happening at least in part within academia, are certainly not merely academic," (Alkon and Guthman 2017).

Alkon and Guthmans' work itself goes well beyond the academic echo chamber, and the book itself is certainly written in a much more accessible language than most academic texts.

However, the book has continued to gain little traction among the locavore mainstream, with reviews and press continuing to come largely from academic institutions, I do wonder that perhaps it may not quite match up to the average locavore readership. They come out of the gate strong and rightfully so, but as we have learned from Michael Pollan, broader locavore audiences don't want to listen to anyone's strong opinion until they've been gently guided to it themselves first. Despite the accessible language in *A New Food Activism* and the way in which the work it represents went beyond academia, I have to wonder what's holding it back from

being eaten up by broader local food audiences on the ground the way that people eat up Pollan's writing, as Guthman herself pondered back when she wrote *Agrarian Dreams*.

Regardless, the incredibly comprehensive book has three leading criticisms of common food activism that are now being addressed by many food activists. First, a critical look is taken at what "alternative" food and agriculture really are. Alternative food movements are, of course, alternative to conventional, industrial agriculture, and separate themselves from the system which they deem as broken. But they are also alternative to traditional forms of social change which take real political action. The market-based weapon of choice, voting with our forks, values the consumer over the citizen, and has become the sole method of activism in the average locavore's life over enacting citizenship politically.

The second critique is stronger and more crystalized than ever before, purporting that this "*theory of social change is one of attrition*," leaving the most marginalized producers and consumers behind to fight for their sovereignty on their own (Alkon and Guthman 2017). In an alternative locavore utopia for the few, the masses have been rather abandoned as participants of a system that doesn't deserve their support. Despite constantly coming up with innovative ways to form local food systems separate from the dominant population, such as home gardening and familial networks, both laborers and consumers from lower socioeconomic classes are excluded from participating in cash-based local food systems. This emphasis that locavores put on market-based modes of change is a major limitation of alternative food systems which causes their power and benefits to be distributed highly unevenly to a very privileged few.

The third and likely most important critique emphasizes a high-priority need to shift the agency away "*from those who eat to those who work*," and promote worker-led solutions that are supported by the consumer's collaborative power within a Capitalist system (Alkon and Guthman 2017, p 166). Voting with our forks retains all the agency in the hands of the consumer. Our local food activism is in just as dire a need for radicalization as our local food discourse.

That means that when we vote with our forks, we the consumers become the people choosing whether or not a company is supported. We're the people deciding what is valued in our local food systems and what is not. We're the ones who speak up and are heard. It's not that voting with our forks is not important, it is very much essential to keeping our local communities healthy. It's just that voting with our forks completely omits and excludes so many groups of people—namely, the migrant workers who work in our local food systems, but also the masses of socioeconomically disadvantaged people who are stuck producing and consuming within our industrial food systems.

And it's not just that. Voting with our forks is sort of the only way many of us take action in making change in this world, and we neglect taking real political action in our individual lives as a result of feeling like we've already done our part. I know that we're all just doing what we can and that it's nearly impossible to even incorporate a nightly floss session into one's schedule, so asking someone to incorporate participation in worker-led political movements when they don't even know how to imagine what that means—it's a lot. I know it's a lot. But bear with me! We don't know all the answers yet, but our future worker-consumer collaborations will prove fruitful, as has already been documented in worker-led efforts across the country.

A New Food Activism takes us through examples of worker-led, consumer-supported movements that have successfully brought political, structural change to the masses. The successful transition of alternative food movements into worker-led efforts is enabled by what can be referred to as the latent power of local. This is the caveat in big ag's cooption of local, organic products. Right now, there is the broadest customer base of ethical consumers that this country has ever seen, buying into products that claim to be ethically produced. Once those consumers realize that they have power far beyond the act of consumption and follow the lead of worker-led efforts, producers are forced to comply in our Capitalist system where the customer is always right (Alkon and Guthman 2017). Of course, there is more to it than that. But nonetheless, the untapped army of locavore consumers is needed and actively requested by worker-led efforts and collaborations, even beyond the realm of food.

But it's not just about collaborations between workers and consumers within local food systems. We all know that voting with your fork excludes socioeconomically challenged *consumers* from participating or benefiting from alternative food systems. But more than being excluded from the act of ethical consumption itself, the elitist air of our local food systems can become off-putting and exclusive to consumers on its own. Our local food systems need to expand to include a great many people who have not previously been welcomed as producers or consumers, via omission or otherwise.

This elitist tone of the locavore is exemplified well in a review in Slate magazine of *Labor and the Locavore*. Out of the many reviews on Gray's ethnography, this one was particularly comprehensive and was able to translate many essential points to its non-academic readers in an accessible way. However, near the end of the review the author slides in an extra little note, safely tucked inside parentheses as if it were whispered as an afterthought (Anderson 2014):

“(Anyone who is not transported by the flavor of a local tomato, who prefers the Campbell's Soup he grew up on, may conclude that there is no place for him in the food movement.)”

For a food movement to be truly successful as a network of people from all areas of society, there needs to be a place for everyone. It is a privilege to deeply know the taste of a local tomato, a privilege that I did not have for many years of my life, and a privilege that can take years to develop. If my younger self had been told that there was no place for me in the food movement, perhaps I wouldn't be here now. And for a piece entitled *Limits of the Locavore*, the author certainly has some limitations of their own that have not been addressed.

Beyond socioeconomic and emotional exclusion, cultural exclusion within our local food movements is also rampant. Just three years before *A New Food Activism* was published, another book entitled *Food Activism: Agency, Democracy and Economy* addressed just that. In its pages, many of the same lessons that we have already explored were emphasized. The authors draw attention to the fact that the local food movement's obsession with market-based approaches is a severe limitation to our local food communities, and that more broadly,

our local food movements have yet to significantly address “race- and class-based inequalities,” (Counihan and Siniscalchi 2014).

The third chapter, *Engaging Latino Immigrants in Seattle Food Activism through Urban Agriculture* opens up with a quote from Eric Holt-Giménez as he addressed an audience at the University of Washington (Mares 2014),

“You know, there’s a sick joke amongst older farmers here because the average age of a farmer in the United States is approaching sixty right now... in ten years the average age of the American farmer is going to be dead. Nonetheless, this country is full of farmers! They are standing on the street corners looking for work. They come from Mexico, Honduras, Nicaragua, Guatemala, Colombia, Panama. They’ve been displaced! They mow our lawn, they pump our gas, they cook our food in the fancy restaurants, those are farmers. We’re surrounded by farmers. They’re out of work.”

Throughout the authors’ research, it was shown that many Latinx immigrants as consumers participated heavily in their local food communities back in their home countries but have very low participation in local food in the United States. The barriers that keep the Latinx population excluded from the local food community in the US are explored as a result of the historically white institutions who run them and socioeconomical challenges combined (Mares 2014). We’ll go more into the oft elite nature of local food in the section on radicalizing local food discourse.

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Capitalism & Collaborative Change

Getting closer and closer to the present, the same year that *A New Food Activism* came out, Eric Holt-Giménez also just published his own radical book on food, entitled *A Foodie's Guide to Capitalism: Understanding the Political Economy of What We Eat*. Progressive discourse, food-related or otherwise, is becoming increasingly critical of Capitalism's proliferation of inequity, or at the very least, the specific breed of unregulated Capitalism thriving in the US currently. Written in exceptionally accessible language, *A Foodie's Guide to Capitalism* explains the more complicated elements of our food system directly to foodies, or locavores, or whatever you want to call them, and avoids more of the technical academic jargon that is used throughout *A New Food Activism*. Regardless, the two are neck and neck on Amazon's Best Seller list currently (Amazon 2019a, 2019b).

The book opens up describing why it is so very important to understand the political landscape within which our food system resides for anyone who wishes to truly change it, a subject in which foodies are sorely lacking. Holt-Giménez explains that while many locavores, foodies, and food activists talk about fixing a broken food system, our food system is not actually broken—it functions precisely as an unregulated Capitalist food system was built to function (Holt-Giménez 2017). Many progressive efforts to fix the food system that aren't aware of this larger structural reality can't go very far in changing it. Creating alternatives to the brokenness doesn't make it less broken.

So how does our Capitalist food system function? To put it simply, the Capitalist food system that proliferates in the United States and the majority of the globe functions by devaluing and robbing wealth from both the environment *and* from human labor, redistributing it to the pockets of the Capitalists (Holt-Giménez 2017). Nearly all efforts to fix the food system are focused on bettering environmental health and individual health, but completely omit and therefore continually oppress the vulnerable human beings who have been exploited for their labor. Any food movement that addresses either environmental exploitation or labor exploitation as the only issue does not take into consideration that it is only the combined exploitation of both that makes our food systems function the way that they do.

As discussed in the introduction to this chapter, Holt-Giménez places food movements along a spectrum from progressive to radical, as seen in figure 2 below. Taking a look at the right two columns of this table, we can see some of the major differences between progressive and radical food movements. Progressive food movements focus more on food justice in their discourse and have an empowerment orientation, while radical food movement discourse centers on food sovereignty with an orientation of entitlement. This is not entitlement in the millennial sense, but rather that workers are seen as being entitled to the same rights as all other actors in our food system. In more progressive food systems, worker rights are discussed in a way that says, “let me empower you with all my power” rather than acknowledging that we are all entitled to have agency in making change to our own lives.

POLITICS, PRODUCTION MODELS, AND APPROACHES			Food Movements	
POLITICS	Corporate Food Regime		Food Movements	
	NEOLIBERAL	REFORMIST	PROGRESSIVE	RADICAL
	Reactionary Neoliberalism	Conservative Neoliberalism	Neoliberalism	Diverse, Re-Politicized Counter-Movement
Discourse	Food Enterprise	Food Security	Food Justice	Food Sovereignty
Main Institutions	International Finance Corporation (World Bank); IMF; WTO; USDA; Global Food Security Bill; Green Revolution; Millennium Challenge; Heritage Foundation; Chicago Global Council; Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation	International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (World Bank); FAO; UN Commission on Sustainable Development; International Federation of Agricultural Producers; mainstream Fair Trade; Slow Food; some Food Policy Councils; most food banks and food aid programs	Alternative Fair Trade and Slow Foods chapters; many organizations in the Community Food Security Movement; CSAs; many Food Policy Councils and Youth-led food and justice movements; many farmworker and labor organizations	Via Campesina; International Planning Committee on Food Sovereignty; Global March for Women; many Food Justice and rights-based movements
Orientation	Corporate	Development	Empowerment	Entitlement
Model	Overproduction; corporate concentration; unregulated markets and monopolies; monocultures (including organic); GMOs; agrofuels; mass global consumption of industrial food; phasing out of peasant and family agriculture and local retail	Mainstreaming/ certification of niche markets (for example, organic, fair, local, sustainable); maintaining Northern agricultural subsidies; “sustainable” roundtables for agrofuels, soy, forest products, etc.; market-led land reform	Agroecologically produced local food; investment in underserved communities; new business models and community benefit packages for production, processing and retail; better wages for ag. workers; solidarity economies; land access; regulated markets and supply	Democratization of food system; dismantle corporate agri-foods monopoly power; parity; redistributive land reform; community rights to water and seed; regionally based food systems; sustainable livelihoods; ; protection from dumping/ overproduction; revival of agroecologically managed peasant agriculture to distribute wealth and cool the planet
Approach to the food and environmental crises	Increased industrial production; unregulated corporate monopolies; land grabs; expansion of GMOs; public-private partnerships; sustainable intensification and climate-smart agriculture; liberal markets; internationally sourced food aid	Same as Neoliberal but w/increased middle peasant production and some locally sourced food aid; more agricultural aid, but tied to GMOs and “bio-fortified/climate-resistant” crops	Institutionalizing the Right to Food; better safety nets; sustainably produced, locally sourced food; agroecologically based agricultural development	Human right to food sovereignty; locally sourced, sustainably produced, culturally appropriate, democratically controlled focus on UN/FAO negotiations
Guiding document	WB 2009 Development Report	WB 2009 Development Report	International Assessment of Agricultural Knowledge, Science and Technology for Development (IAASTD)	

Figure II. Politics, production models, and approaches to our food system as outlined by Eric Holt-Giménez in *A Foodie’s Guide to Capitalism* (Holt-Giménez 2017).

Moreover, progressive food movements function primarily on a model of food production—ie. the way the food is produced is the top priority. On the other hand, in more radical food movements, changing the political structures that underlie our food system in order to promote equity is the top priority, and producing food sustainably is just one part of doing that. Straight up, progressive food movements focus on creating a utopia for the few and dabble in promoting equity for others on the side, whereas radical food movements see inequality and the structures that promote it as of primary concern. When locavores are happily walking around the farmers market voting with their dollars and don't even look twice at a youth member asking for signatures on a petition, this disparity is particularly evident.

Through a thorough analysis of social movements of all sorts throughout history, Holt-Giménez finds that one commonality that weaves its way through all successful major social revolutions are cross-class alliances. In our food systems, these strong alliances could be made between laborers and consumers in order to achieve successful, radical change. Although we don't often think about the concept of classes in the US in the bourgeoisie-proletariat sense, I can't help but think twice about the normalized usage of the word "bougie" to describe high-end artisanal products and the people who consume them. It is clear that there are distinct class differences in our local food systems between those who consume local foods and those who do not, and that collaboration between these two groups is necessary. In this sense, the proletariat are not only the local farmworkers who do not consume the food they produce, but also the socioeconomically challenged and excluded consumers who cannot access local foods.

In *A New Food Activism*, examples of successful worker-led, consumer-supported food movements are explored in detail. As stated in a section titled, *Toward a Class-Conscious and Confrontational Food Politics* (Alkon and Guthman 2017),

"These alliances reveal that a deeper class consciousness is an essential ingredient for challenging political and economic elites to take care of food workers. As a result, labor-food justice alliances achieved concrete reforms such as wage and benefit increases... Building alliances, organizing rallies, and protesting can lead to concessions and reforms otherwise unattainable through prefigurative politics."

It is often assumed by progressive food activists that workers in vulnerable situations don't know how to fight for themselves, or if they did they wouldn't want to risk it since they have everything to lose. However, in *A New Food Activism*, the authors point out that many migrants have experience in participating in various movements in their home countries, and that we actually have a lot that we could learn from them in the art of making social change (Alkon and Guthman 2017). Also, the preponderance of worker-led movements throughout history in this country alone shows us that workers are very much willing to risk everything to fight for their rights and better lives for their families and communities.

Another academic publication from the same year, *Food, Agriculture, and Social Change: The Everyday Vitality of Latin America*, further emphasizes that local food discourse largely draws from white research and white communities, and that there are many other ways to perform food activism that exist outside of the narrow American local food repertoire, ways which are embraced fully across Latin America (Sherwood, Arce, and Paredes 2017). Throughout a series of grounded case studies across Latin America, we learn that although modern American food activism loosely throws around words like “movement,” “resistance,” and “fight,” they do not mean what they used to mean. These words, along with citizens in the US in general, have forgotten the power that they have to make institutional changes. This is largely seen as a result of the polarized forms of thought that dominate our alternative food networks, which lead to a simplification of our very complex food system issues (Sherwood, Arce, and Paredes 2017).

But the relationship between the United States and Latin America is not simply one where we have something to learn from one another—we're a lot more intertwined than that. In the amazingly comprehensive new 2018 release of *Eating NAFTA: Trade, Food Policies, and the Destruction of Mexico*, Alyshia Gálvez explores how political policies are often perceived as abstract and distant from individual lives and yet actually have immense effects on our food systems and on our individual lives, regardless of which side of the border you are on (Gálvez 2018). There is no better example of this than NAFTA itself, the North American Free Trade

Agreement, which binds together the lives and foodways of people across the Americas, for better or for worse—in this case, very much for the worse.

In a section titled, *“It’s the Capitalism,”* Gálvez confirms the limitations of citizens as consumers and market-based solutions. In the food scholar community, the same conclusions are being made over and over again. Gálvez continues to explore the ways in which her tangled international bird’s-eye-view of our food systems is severely lacking from current American local and alternative food movements and perspectives. Just like many of the food scholars before her, Gálvez draws our attention to our inextricable sovereignty and the need for elitist food movements operating in isolation to recognize it.

More radical academic research critiquing our progressive local food systems is coming out every day and there are many sources which did not make it into my overview. But in general, everyone is pointing in the same direction. Structural race- and class-based inequalities aren’t being addressed, and workers and consumers within our local food systems need to collaborate to address them. Our ability to make change as a people is rooted in our power as individuals, as engaged citizens, and that power wielded in collaboration toward taking political action is the tool we need to learn how to use beyond just voting with our forks. But locavores don’t know that yet.

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[The Academic Echo Chamber](#)

Many attempts have been made within the academic arena to both critique local food systems with a reflexive eye and to consolidate those critiques, but as we have seen, these critiques have struggled to make their way to the very communities who need to hear them most.

In 2011, a piece was published in an academic journal entitled, *“Are local food and the local movement taking us where we want to go? Or are we hitching our wagons to the wrong stars?”* (DeLind 2011). Written by a Michigan State anthropologist, the piece reads in a way that serves as a very gentle nudge to the local food community that perhaps their silver bullet isn’t so perfect. It explores three “emphases” of local food movements that steer locavores farther away from deeper ethical concerns and systemic roots, contrasting them with Dahlberg’s needs of a regenerative society that enables “fair distribution of resources, voice, and power,” (ibid).

First, the Locavore Emphasis on individual consumerism deflects social responsibility, giving a sense of “me” rather than “we.” Second, the Wal-Mart Emphasis refers to local’s definition being reduced to a distance to the closest warehouse, rather than being defined from values from within the movement itself. Lastly, the Pollan Emphasis promotes the idea that the eater and what is being eaten are of the greatest concern, ignoring local’s role in restoring “a public culture of democracy.”

The following year in a graduate report entitled *Where’s the Justice? A Review of the Local Food Movement Through a Reflexive Lens*, the plethora of academic critiques of our local food system were consolidated into five categories and summarized (Kilmer 2012). Pulling from many of the same sources and confirming the same critiques that we explored in the previous section on the academic echo chamber, the five critiques are as follows: paternalism and politics of conversion, normative conceptions of scale, privilege and elitism, furthering a neoliberal agenda, and a lack of reflexivity. Written in thick academic language, the text is not obviously not for mainstream audiences, although it is an incredibly useful and organized synthesis for scholars.

The fifth critique is what concerns us most. The lack of reflexivity in our local food systems is described as “the failure to critically reflect on positionality,” and which results in a failure to recognize and address the four preceding critiques. Reflexivity refers to the same concept that I have been referring to as a lack of awareness of structural issues and privileged positionality among locavores. The paper goes on to emphasize that the lack of reflexivity in our local food systems is not only a critique posed by food scholars, but that the incorporation of reflexivity

into our local food systems is a necessary step in addressing the structural issues that infiltrate all of our systems, including local food. The author writes,

“The expectation that food choices will be made according to certain values and ethics is rarely explicitly stated but is nonetheless pervasively felt by those outside this dominant and normative group (Harper 2011). This is not due so much to intentionally exclusionary practices as it is to a lack of reflexivity. A reflexive stance, as opposed to a normative perspective, would allow for recognition of, and challenges to, taken for granted assumptions and white privilege.”

It is clear that food scholars in academia are aware of the issues within our local food systems. They’ve been distilling them into neat lists, reviews, and compilations. And moreover, it seems that they are aware that most locavores are not aware of these issues, although it is rarely discussed how to remedy that. Why is it that these critiques so often remain within academic walls? In his conclusion to *Where is the Justice?*, the author outlines who his review is intended for (Kilmer 2012):

“This paper contributes much to those, whether activists, community organizers or city planners looking for an academic perspective on ways to incorporate social justice into food systems, academics looking for an easily accessible synopsis of critiques, or even consumers seeking to expand their perspective on food systems.”

I repeat—“or even consumers seeking to expand their perspective on food systems.” Why is communication to the actual local food community seen as an afterthought to contributing to the academic discourse? Throughout my own research, I have felt pressured to write in the dry academic voice intended for academic journals, seeking approval and authorization of my views from the academic echo chamber, worried that my work will not be respected if directed to a more general audience in a more engaging narrative format. I wonder how such pressure on food scholars contributes to limiting radical and reflexive thought to academic audiences, but that is a query to explore more deeply at another time.

As we have seen, the academic literature, having built on each other's concepts throughout time, has been settling upon the same major critiques of our local food systems over and over again for nearly twenty years. Radical critiques of the fault lines within our local food systems are being discussed widely in the academic literature. But where are radical critiques of our local food systems occurring *within* our local food systems? How are people on the ground interacting with our local food systems and talking about them? Where are radical conversations happening and where aren't they? How is reflexivity being embraced by actors within our local food community and how is it not? The reflexivity review ends with "Hints, Tips, and Guidelines About How To Use Reflexivity," listed as follows.

"Think critically; Challenge normative conceptions; Be aware that many things are not inherently given but are instead socially constructed; Think reflexively regarding your standpoint and positionality, and that of others' positionality; All of these guidelines can be applied to the local food movement; Continue thinking about how to change larger systems of injustice; Address state injustice in the system; Remember, it's not the fault of the local food movement, injustice is everywhere," (Kilmer 2012).

This concluding list is reminiscent of the six steps toward a comprehensive food ethic suggested in *Labor and the Locavore*, and DeLind's piece also ends by giving specific suggestions for bringing locavores in a more reflexive, critical state of mind. DeLind and Gray emphasize the importance of asking questions about labor at the farmers market, but overall their solutions are solely based in altering the discourse rather than working collectively to redistribute power. There is little mention of the migrant workers and their role in reclaiming our local food communities in our local food systems in either DeLind's nor Kilmer's papers.

Today, outside of academic circles, the majority of locavores are rather uncritical, or unreflexive, of our beloved local food systems. But nonetheless societal entropy is high, and radical thoughts and actions are beginning to burble to the surface. But what does this look like in reality? How are locavores utilizing reflexivity and critique of their local food communities? What questions are people asking at the farmers market? Who is there asking those questions

and who is there to answer them? How are our local small farms and farmers being represented both in the media and on social media? Where is migrant labor in all of these conversations? Are migrant laborers themselves a part of the conversation? How is migrant labor being discussed, if at all, by US-born locavores?

These are some of the many awkward questions to be explored when navigating the fault lines within our food systems, but this time, they've become rather personal. Within the academic echo chamber, nothing is very personal, because the locavores being critiqued are not a part of the conversation. It's easy to critique something when the people being critiqued aren't there.

We are the locavores being asked to be more reflexive and critical, and we are the ones asking the questions and dishing out answers at the farmers market. We're the ones liking the social media posts and reading the articles. We're the ones who are unaware of our own privilege and ineffective change-making habits, despite the best of intentions.

Migrant workers haven't been a part of our conversations we probably haven't been thinking or talking about them at all—let alone, with them. And if we have, we probably didn't think about them as if they had agency or were a part of our local food community in any way. It's not that we're hateful, a lot of us just never thought to think about it. Not aware. Not critical of what we don't know. Reflexivity is personal work. Radicalization is personal work. And this work is more important than ever. This is largely what makes critique outside the echo chamber so awkward.

Although the dichotomy promoted by Michael Pollan's earlier works continues to dominate mainstream local food discourse, he continues to be a part of radicalization in our local food systems as well. In a Civil Eats piece entitled *Food and More: Expanding the Movement for the Trump Era*, Pollan teams up with other food writers and scholars and invites the mainstream local food movement to get radical.

"As people who care not only about food but related progressive issues, our task should be to join together to actively resist efforts to roll back the public protections we have gained, and in favor of the social justice issues we will continue to fight for. This means that important but

parochial food issues, such as the labeling of GMOs or the formulation of national nutrition standards, are bound to be overshadowed as the larger fight for social justice becomes more urgent... You can't fix agriculture without addressing immigration and labor," (Bittman et al. 2017).



Chapter II. The Edge of Radical Local Food Discourse in the Willamette Valley

Introduction

In the previous section we looked at radical local food discourse within the academic realm and learned about all the ways in which locavores could do with a much better understanding of the complexities of our local food systems and how we interact with them. This section will focus on the state of local food discourse among locavores themselves in the Willamette Valley area, centered around the hopping local Portland food scene. I explore the edge of radical local food discourse in four consecutive narratives that serve as examples of where radicalization is happening and not happening within our specific local food community.

The first section looks at dominant local food discourse specifically in the Portland farm-to-table food scene through the lens of Portland chef, Joshua McFadden's 2017 cookbook, *Six Seasons: A New Way with Vegetables*. *Six Seasons* skillfully invites readers to appreciate and enjoy the particular diversity that the Pacific Northwest has to offer through becoming more in tune with the seasonality of the food in the region. Like the majority of my own food writing, the values being promoted center around deepening the locavore connection to local food and ways to enjoy it and is meant to be celebratory of the successes of our local food systems rather than particularly critical of what is wrong in industrial agriculture. This inadvertently fuels the misconception that there are not major critiques to be made of local food systems themselves, and that just as Michael Pollan's writing promotes, the eater and what is eaten are of the utmost importance and a resulting dynamic of food elitism results.

After taking a look at local food discourse that doesn't embrace much radical thought at all which dominates our local food community in the Willamette Valley, we'll explore an example of local food discourse that specifically addresses the labor challenges on local small farms, but not in a radical, reflexive way. Taking a look at Oregon Tilth's recent publication entitled *Farm*

Viability In Changing Times, migrant labor is seen solely as a financial challenge for white farm owners—very not radical. And yet the previous publication’s issue was titled Social Equity and focused heavily on including perspectives on our local food systems that have not historically been included in the dominant narrative. Through this navigation we can see how in some places radical thought and problematic thought are happening simultaneously. Major actors within our local food community continue to lack a more critical understanding of the structural inequities that permeate our lives and the voices that aren’t a part of the conversation.

The third section tells the story of the night the 2019 *Farming While Black* book tour came to the Portland food scene for a night of connection, radical thought, and candid conversation about agriculture’s incredibly racist history. Structural racism is deeply imbedded in our local food communities, and even though it is uncomfortable and energetically expensive for people to address it, it needs to be done. As author Leah Penniman says, our local food communities need to be focused on “uprooting racism and seeding sovereignty,” (L. Penniman 2018).

Although the majority of this thesis focuses on the plight of the migrant farmworker, both the Latinx migrant community and the Black community suffer from structural racism and share history. With that being said, I am no expert on the Black experience in Oregon, and I include this story because it exemplifies the kinds of radical conversations that we should be having in our local food communities.

Our adventure ends at the 2019 annual Small Farm Conference that Oregon State University hosts every year. Radical and reflexive thought was in some ways the motif of this year’s gathering, thanks to the Back to the Root conference. However, radical thought was unevenly distributed across sessions and people. Although it was more inclusive of people of color within the small farming community, I couldn’t help but think about the migrant farmworkers who continued to be unrepresented. On the edge of reflexive radicalization, the layers of structural racism continually reveal themselves if we learn to look.

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Six Seasons and other Sexy Foodie Vibes

The Willamette Valley home to Portland, Oregon is one of the major alternative food hubs in the country. This is largely due to the region's Mediterranean growing climate, whose mild winters and long dry summers provide the perfect conditions for an incredible diversity of seasonal crops to flourish. In addition to the climate, the soils of the Willamette Valley have been fertilized by the settled silts from the great Missoula floods of nearly twenty thousand years ago. Over the course of a few thousand years, ice dams would periodically break, sending thousands of square miles of Montana soils and waters down through Washington and into the bowl that is this moist valley (WFLP 2017).

In 2017, Portland chef and author, Joshua McFadden, published the cookbook *Six Seasons: A New Way with Vegetables*, which celebrates the dense seasonality of produce in the Pacific Northwest and serves as the epitome of what dominant local food culture is in the valley. With a background in farming and cooking, McFadden sources the produce for his restaurants—*Ava Gene's* and *Tusk*—from the Willamette Valley and frequents the bustling Portland State farmers market. *Ava Gene's* was named "one of Bon Appétit's five Best New Restaurants in America," in 2013 and *Tusk* followed suit in 2017 (Submarine Hospitality 2019).

In *Six Seasons*, McFadden breaks summer up into three seasons to itself, as there is such a diversity of fresh foods debuting daily during our summers' Mediterranean months. He teaches the reader how to pay attention to the way that vegetables change throughout the season and to enjoy them at their best. The year it was published, *Six Seasons* was named as a "Best Cookbook of the Year by the *Wall Street Journal*, *The Atlantic*, *Bon Appétit*, *Food Network Magazine*... and more," (Amazon 2017), bringing the national spotlight to Portland's local food scene—the epitome of what local food means to the dominant culture in the United States.

Being in touch with the seasons can be such a titillating tactile sensation. What's not to love? To love tomatoes while they're in season, to truly miss them for the long winter months of roots

and squash, to experience a wave of excitement pulse through your body when you take that first bite of the first tomato of the season—it is divine. And in a world where we are so out of tune with our natural rhythms, for many of us, connecting with the seasons through food is our only escape from our industrialized lifestyles. This meaningful medicine is not to be belittled.

But this devotion to seasonality can be so strong that many locavores look down upon straying outside of season, contributing to the elitism of our local food communities. Even though it doesn't make sense, personally I will sooner splurge on some processed food from my childhood than dare to buy a tomato in December. Spicy Nacho Doritos taste the same year-round, but a good tomato is only available a third of the year.

But I didn't think like that for a long time. Like the majority of Americans, I thought a tomato was a tomato was a tomato. My first year working at the farm, my go-to meal was a box of Pasta Roni served with an organic chicory salad in a shallot balsamic reduction. But I couldn't let any of my new farm friends know that I ate processed food! Now, looking back at my food journey, I see so much beauty in that meal and like to encourage others in my life to embrace doing what they can without shame. There is room in our local food community for everyone.

Despite the strong seasonal dedication that I have now for myself, I would never shame anyone for buying a tomato out of season nor would I refuse to eat one. It isn't about hating or excluding. It's about loving the very unique flavor of a favorite first fruit of the season in a place that you call home. When you feel it, it feels nice. But it is a privilege to access that feeling. It's important to remember that. It is a privilege that has gone unrecognized by many locavores, as exemplified by the aforementioned comment from Slate magazine.

“(Anyone who is not transported by the flavor of a local tomato, who prefers the Campbell's Soup he grew up on, may conclude that there is no place for him in the food movement.)”

Six Seasons has taught us to think about Oregon's seasonal bounty in an entirely new way, providing a framework for locavores to celebrate diversity and connect with the seasons of a place. This kind of place-based identity building has been sorely lacking from our industrialized

societies and allows local food to nourish local people in more ways than just metabolically. Hitting home on so many levels, *Six Seasons* has been a huge success in its adoption by the Willamette Valley local food community and the national alternative food movement at large. It serves as an example of what locavores value so highly. Just a few pages in, McFadden makes his intentions known.

"I'm not on a mission to point out the ills of industrial farming... My intent is to celebrate all the positive changes that have unfolded over the past couple of decades... I'm begging you to jump on the joyful ride of eating with the seasons."

McFadden, like many food writers, follows along in the footsteps of Michael Pollan, luring society into a more sustainable way of life with pleasure. I've followed along a similar path as a food writer in the same Portland food community myself. McFadden has often stopped by our booth at the Portland State (PSU) farmers market, supporting us and many other local farms that are celebrated across menus of Portland's finest restaurants. I purchased his book the instant it came out, feeling a comradeship in our celebratory seasonal vibes. I have kept seasonality close to heart in my own food writing, whether I was writing a CSA newsletter, an informative sign at market, or a social media post, like this one.

"Stop, drop kaboom, baby we've got tomatoes!!!! Early bird gets the tom. Plus we've got Zucchini, Garlic, Garlic Scapes, Fava Beans, Basil, Sweeeet Seascapes Outdoor Strawberries, Sugarsnap Peas, and so soo much more. Not a moment goes by that we aren't grateful to live in one of the most diverse food production regions of the world. #organicfarming #farmlife #marketlife #eatseasonal #eatlocal #knowyourfarmer #portlandfarmersmarket #slinginveg #pacificnorthwest #eatgoodfeelgood #vegucation #luda"

This is typical of the sorts of posts I like to write, the types of discourse that I produce for the farm. Engaging, particularly to a younger audience (shout out to the four of you who appreciate the Ludacris reference), celebratory of seasonality, and nurturing of a collective place-based identity. In addition to promoting a connection with the seasons, gratitude for the bounty that one's locality provides can also work to make people feel pride for the region that they live in,

further strengthening personal identity. Taking a stroll through the market becomes a weekly part of peoples' lives. Identifying with our local farmers and with our region is a form of intimacy. And the more intimate one gets with their food, the more nourishing that food can become.

I personally adore my copy of *Six Seasons*. I use it as inspiration in my own kitchen, see it as an example of what great food writing can be, and have shared countless recipes from it with my CSA customers. I do however think that his recipes are particularly complicated, despite how the foodie reviews say it's perfect for beginners. Although the recipes were inspiring in my own kitchen, I usually simplified them for my CSA customers, thinking of the parents and families who struggle to finish all their produce before the week's end. But in analyzing both it and my own writing as examples of local food discourse, I can't help but notice many of the underlying assumptions embedded within the way we value our local systems that does not take into consideration the structural critiques outlined so clearly in the academic echo chamber.

It's less about something being wrong with *Six Seasons* or my social media post for the farm. It's more about everything that the dominant voice of local food does not say. I've written dozens of CSA newsletters and social media posts that portrayed an image of the farm that successfully highlighted the joy of seasonality whilst also omitting my Latinx coworkers, as did many of the farm's writers that came before me, without even really thinking about it.

The dominant local food discourse in the Willamette Valley celebrates environmental health and individual health gleaned through environmental and community connections. But the community who defines those values and participates in local food discourse is quite exclusive and limited in diverse perspectives. The voices of migrant workers are not there. No one thinks about how they're not there. Taking a look at many of my favorite local farms on social media, most of us remain within the safe, soft, and sexy foodie vibes. A very few actors within our local food communities expand beyond celebratory local food discourse to include any type of critical radical thought. Radical locavores are a growing percentage for sure, but the radicalization has really only just begun.

Farm Viability in Changing Times—Just a Farm Owner’s Problem?

The majority of local food discourse falls under the category of wholly progressive. But aside from food writing in our local food discourse that rather unknowingly omits the migrant perspective altogether, there are a good many sources that are beginning to actually focus on labor issues in our local food systems, sometimes in the “right way”, sometimes not so much.

One of my favorite examples is in the recent Winter 2019 edition of Oregon Tilth’s quarterly, *In Good Tilth*. Oregon Tilth was one of the first organic certification services in the nation, and currently certifies farms throughout much of the Americas, north and south. At a 1974 Washington symposium entitled *Agriculture for a Small Planet*, Wendell Berry spoke about the loss of healthy agriculture and inspired a handful of community members to create the Tilth Alliance, which later birthed Oregon Tilth (Musick 2008; Oregon Tilth 2019a). As Oregon Tilth states on their website,

“Wendell Berry... said, ‘If we allow another generation to pass without doing what is necessary to enhance and embolden the possibility of strong agricultural communities, we will lose it altogether.’ A few months later, our organization was born.”

Born out of strong agrarian and environmental values, Oregon Tilth has become a major actor in the certification of organic farms throughout North and South America. Over the past four years, radical and reflexive thought has been promoted by *In Good Tilth* in some issues, while remaining rather progressive and sometimes quite problematic in others. 2016 was home to many radical issues as exemplified in the summer edition entitled *Farm Labor and Social Justice* (Oregon Tilth 2016). The issue tells many important stories that have yet to be told, partners

with Latinx advocacy groups to provide a platform for farmworker voices and shines a reflexive lens on organic agriculture's ability to address social justice issues.

The fall issues of 2017 and 2018 were both titled *Social Equity*, devoted to discussing the equity of both workers and consumers of organic food systems. The 2018 issue featured a female farmer of color on the cover and a variety of pieces highlighting examples of organic ag efforts that also address social equity (Oregon Tilth 2018). Oregon Tilth is very much actively working to promote radical thought within our local food systems. But in the winter 2019 edition entitled *Farm Viability*, its cover features a group of older white men grimacing at a tractor in motion. Immediately upon seeing that cover I felt like the edition was not going to be nearly as radical as the others.

The feature piece of the edition was entitled *Farm Viability in Changing Times: as old models falter, farmers try new models* (Waterbury 2019). The cover photo for the piece showcases a variety of fresh vegetables displayed on a wooden table but gives way to a full page photo within the piece of a migrant worker picking curly green kale. The early morning sunlight is hitting the dew on the kale that the worker in the photo has just snapped, sending a million tiny sparkles into the air around the fluffy leaves. The caption under the photo reads,

"A worker on Persephone Farm in Lebanon, Oregon. Jeff Falen, the farm's co-owner, worries about the sustainability of organic farming given its high labor costs."

Looking further into the piece, I notice that mitigating environmental exploitation was highly valued, whereas labor exploitation is somehow not discussed despite the seemingly obvious connection. Persephone doesn't use any plastic mulch or greenhouses for seasonal extension—the go-to money-maker for small local organic farms—which really is impressive. I often stop by their booth at market to appreciate their beautiful plastic-guilt-free bounty. But the article goes on to refer to this sacrifice made in the name of the environment as a major factor that makes their profit margins even tighter, which in turn makes paying for labor even more difficult.

This is true, and it's a financial reality that our local small farms very legitimately face. Therefore, the crux of the article sees labor as a challenge, but for the farm owner, not the laborer. It discusses labor and stricter immigration policies as a top pressing issue for small farm owners, not for the laborers themselves. The story is told entirely from the perspective of the white farm owner viewing labor solely as a financial challenge "in a tight labor market," (Waterbury 2019). Overall, the piece provides farm owner solutions for farm owner problems, reporting that farmers are resulting to scaling down their operations "to avoid hiring much, if any, labor... Yet there are concerns about the viability of staying small. What happens when a founder gets injured, or takes time off to have a child?"

Of course, these are challenges faced by the small farm owner that must be addressed. Just as we learned in *Labor and the Locavore*, small farm owners are exploited for their own labor in the unregulated Capitalist industrial food system that we have. However, it seems entirely inappropriate that these challenges be taken into consideration without also acknowledging the challenges faced by the migrant workers themselves. Just because there was an issue focused on farmworker perspectives a few years ago doesn't mean that farmworker perspectives or the lack thereof shouldn't be openly acknowledged everywhere else. But radicalization is uneven.

Migrant workers are discussed as if they are a dwindling inanimate resource, not human beings with their own agency who currently have no voice to be a part of the conversation, but who are picking the beautiful kale in the photo that we love. What happens if the migrant woman in the photograph gets injured or gets pregnant? She has a lot more barriers in her way than the farm owner does. The challenges of the migrant worker should play a major role in how we navigate farm viability in changing times, in addition to the challenges of the small farm owner. Yet in this very progressive piece they are not acknowledged. Not a radical thought in sight.

Looking at what this *In Good Tilth* piece does and doesn't do, the question becomes more about what progress looks like on the radical edge of local food discourse. Obviously, Oregon Tilth is moving toward more radical discourse production, however they still promote more outdated, progressive ways of thought that are disrespectful to the migrant worker experience. I find myself feeling both impressed by Oregon Tilth and disappointed. Is it okay if radical thought is

highlighted sometimes and not others? Does every issue of *In Good Tilth* have to be constantly vigilant about recognizing structural racism and the lenses through which stories are told? Is there space in our local food discourse for radical and reflexive thought to be left out? I don't think so. So goes the process of radicalization, but we do have the power to radicalize faster.

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“Is social equity in organic agriculture more than empty rhetoric, good intentions, an impossible dream? Are we as organic farmers, educators, and advocates really paving the path to fairer food? How do we fight racism, sexism, and classism that we know shape our own beliefs and actions? What concrete, courageous actions must we take--in the field, on the ground-- to change ourselves and change the system?”



These radical and reflexive questions were asked at the 2019 Organicology conference hosted in Portland this February. Organicology has always been more on the radical side, and this year marked the sixth year of collaborative radicalization. To help navigate those difficult questions, Amani Olugbala, Assistant Program Director at Soul Fire Farm, and Sarah Brown, Education Director at Oregon Tilth, led the all-day intensive entitled *Equity in the Organic Movement* (Organicology 2019; Oregon Tilth 2019b). Amani was going to be in town for the conference, which is part of what made the following event possible.

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Uprooting Racism and Seeding Sovereignty—Radicalization in Real Time

On Wednesday, February 13th, Portland's food scene experienced a truly unique and much-needed gathering entitled *Farming While Black*. Just as the sun was going down over the rain-scented concrete city, members of the BIPOC (Black Indigenous People of Color) farming community in the Pacific Northwest cozied up in NE Portland's *Nightwood* to hear Soul Fire Farm's radical message, connect with each other, and share their experiences with the dominantly white farmers and foodies of the Willamette Valley. For many Portlanders, this evening was a first candid conversation about racial injustice in agriculture and the structural racism embedded within us all—a conversation that has been long overdue.

As Soul Fire Farm put it, it was a night to “learn how you too can be part of the movement for food sovereignty and help build a food system based on justice, dignity and abundance for all members of our community,” (L. Penniman 2018). As *Nightwood* posted, the evening inspired by Leah Penniman's 2018 book, *Farming While Black: Soul Fire Farm's Practical Guide to Liberation on the Land*, was “a great opportunity for essential discussion, education and raising awareness of the work and contributions of the Black farming community in Portland, the greater PNW and in a larger cultural context,” (@thenightwoodsociety 2019).

Unlike many progressive local organic farms, Soul Fire Farm in Upstate New York might be the most radical example of what a local small farm can provide for its community. Its sliding scale CSA program that follows an Indigenous African financial model “in the spirit of ujamaa, or cooperative economics,” that works to address socioeconomic inequities. CSA boxes are even delivered door to door in order to reach populations experiencing food apartheid.

Moreover, this amazing farm has addressed their labor challenge by creating a Youth Food Justice program that works to build agency and voice for a hugely marginalized and vulnerable population of BIPOC youth. Partnering with the local courts, youth have the option to complete Soul Fire's “on-farm training program in lieu of punitive sentencing.” As Leah put it,

“It was imperative that we interrupt the school-to-prison pipeline that demonizes and criminalizes our youth. We felt that young people instead needed mentorship from adults with similar backgrounds, connection to land, and full respect for their humanity,” (L. Penniman 2018).

Unlike nearly all the local farms in the Portland area, producing healthy food is only a fraction of Soul Fire Farm’s mission. They put social justice in the fore by dedicating their farm and their work to “Uprooting Racism and Seeding Sovereignty.” Through their radical CSA program that combats race- and class-based inequities, the Youth Food Justice leadership training program that builds agency and voice for the next generation, and a Black-Latinx Farmers Immersion program that works toward making space for all those who have been systematically marginalized, Soul Fire Farm is spreading its roots and Afro-indigenous farming practices throughout the global BIPOC community. Leah has since been named one of 50 fixers who are working toward innovative social change and has much to teach Portland’s farmers and foodies (Grist 2019).

The event was put on in collaboration with Portlanders Shannon Sims of Food Art Love, Lane Selman of the Culinary Breeding Network, The Nightwood Society, and Alison Wu of Wu Haus. Shannon and I have both worked the farmers market for many years. About a month before the show, she stopped by the market booth to buy some veg for a catering gig and we got to talking about the many voices who aren’t being heard in our local food community.

Both speaking the issues that are so close to heart and near tears, she told me about how she saw that Soul Fire Farm was looking for a place in Portland to host the *Farming While Black* book tour. She reached out to them, partnered with the Nightwood to be the venue, and asked Lane of the Culinary Breeding Network (CBN) to collaborate on organizing a local panel. Lane used to work at the farmers market with us too, before she founded CBN and became one of the busiest boss ladies in our local food community. Just recently she was featured as an inaugural Seed Hero by the Seed Saver’s Exchange for individuals who “went above and beyond to advocate for, care for, and preserve heirloom seeds” (@culinarybreedingnetwork 2019).

Lane's work with the Culinary Breeding Network is revolutionizing the Portland food scene, connecting chefs with plant breeders and farmers, fueling the seed-to-table movement, and promoting seed sovereignty in the age of Monsanto. CBN is a branch off of Oregon State University's Plant Breeding and Genetics extension and has been a major force in bringing actors within our local food community together and promoting agricultural education. Shannon's visionary work in holistic health education, community engagement, and food art has brought health and creativity to the lives of many Portlanders, as has the wellness work done by Alison Wu.

Leah's 2019 *Farming While Black* book tour includes talks all around the country, largely hosted by Leah herself, but also by Soul Fire Farm's Amani Olugbala, who graced us with her powerful presence here in Portland. Amani is an amazing force in this world, combining outdoor education, artistic expression, and community and youth outreach as rebellion against the disconnection and hopelessness that threatens our collective humanity (Soul Fire Farm 2019). Originally a participant of Soul Fire Farm's youth program, Amani is now the Assistant Director of Programs, as well as leading her own uplifting raptivist platform as Amani O+. As described on the Soul Fire Farm website, Amani "is a storyteller who weaves music, film, speech and poem into art that highlights social injustice, honors the ancestors and demands for change," (Soul Fire Farm 2019).

When we think of the Portland food scene, we think of bountiful farmers markets, high-end chefs celebrating seasonality, and maybe some hipsters that are too woke for their own good. And although we might not know it, we probably picture white people in all those venues. Everyone loves Portland for its devotion to environmental sustainability, and the city is often cited as the *greenest* in the nation. Farmers, chefs, and customers alike are proud to be a part of such a strong community promoting real food, connection with the earth, and environmental justice.

Although the Pacific Northwest food scene is excellent at working to create an alternative to the environmental sin of industrial agriculture, the structural racism that permeates all areas of

the United States food system—and Oregon agriculture specifically —is only barely beginning to be discussed. Portland might be the greenest city, but green is far from enough.

Tickets oversold, the warmly-lit, trendy event space was overflowing. As the intended start time passed, people continued to file in the door and line up to get their grub on with fresh seasonal produce turned to culinary masterpiece. Once the full house settled into their seats, stands, squats and leans, Shannon introduced Amani and passed the mic.

Standing strong in a black t-shirt that read “Nah, —Rosa Parks, 1955,” Amani started off her presentation by reading a poem by Naima Penniman, Leah’s sister, entitled *Black Gold*, which appears in the back of *Farming While Black*. The piece was beyond beautiful, beyond radical. I want to include the entire moving, melodic masterpiece here, but alas, here is a taste:

“I am evidence of love under fingernails, knee caps stained from kneeling to pray, sacred remains of yesterday, fertile with future.... I am proof of life after death, I am dawning from decay, my belly of mass graves, my open palms of gardens.... I am gold, gold, Gold. You are soiled, filthy, black, dirty, rich. You are soul, soul, Soul. Take me in your palms, breathe in my memory. Remember me. Fall soft where you belong, my seed, I need you. The future depends on me,” (N. Penniman 2018).

Naima’s powerful words continued to vibrate through the room as Amani continued her talk, giving recognition for the land that we were on right then. She opened the conversation up to the audience, asking for everyone to name communities who were here before us. Proudly delivered names of Indigenous groups started popping into the air from the crowd —“Navaho! Chehalis! Nez Perce!” Amani listened fully, took a glass, and poured water out for them all, giving a firm but gentle nod and a “Mmhmm,” after each one.

Amani’s masterful art of the spoken word wove in between historical prose, poetry, and rap. Moving on to the history of racism in agriculture and in Oregon specifically, she explained how African Americans were targeted for their agricultural prowess during the slave trade and how

many of the innovations in agriculture that we attribute to white farmers—crop rotations, composting, cover cropping, etc.—were actually stolen from Black farmers, just like everything else. Moreover, this is hardly ever recognized by white alternative food and farming efforts.

In fact, Amani said, the Victory Gardens that fed forty percent of the nation during times of war were designed by George Washington Carver, a Black agricultural expert of the time. The United States government had approached him in desperation since the monocropped land of slavery plantations had become unhealthy and unproductive, and Carver knew about regenerative agriculture and community empowerment. And yet, in schools across the country we only see pictures of the white “Americans” who both grew and benefited from the Victory Gardens, as white “Americans” were the ones who wrote the textbooks.

Zooming in from the country’s racist agricultural roots and onto Oregon’s specifically, Amani pointed out how Oregon was the only state to join the union with an exclusion clause that made it illegal for Black folks to even exist in the state until the 1920’s. But it gets worse. As stated recently in High Country News,

“When Oregon became a state in 1859, its Constitution boldly declared: ‘No free negro or mulatto not residing in this state at the time of the adoption of this constitution, shall come, reside or be within this state or hold any real estate, or make any contracts, or maintain any suit therein. ...’ Oregon voters didn’t amend their Constitution until 2001,” (Hare 2018)

2001, y’all. Let that soak in a second. Ever wonder why Oregon is so white? Maybe not? Well, that’s why. Somewhat surprised herself after doing some research before coming here, Amani said, “and I guess Oregon, was like, the best at redlining,” which continues in the form of gentrification in Portland today, as well as in many other ways.

But of course, this kind of exclusionary behavior isn’t just found in the real estate industry; there’s been a significant amount of “redlining” in Oregon’s agriculture community as well, keeping black farmers from being able to purchase land, get state or federal grants and loans, and excluding them from the dominant white farming community in a plethora of ways.

People involved in the local food scene in Portland value environmental and social justice, and so it can be surprising to realize that there are still so many blind spots to be addressed. This lack of awareness is just but one form that structural and interpersonal racism takes. Racism affects not just what we see, but what we don't see. And if you're white in Oregon, there's probably a whole lot that you don't yet see. Yet.

After Amani's presentation, she was joined by three members of the black farming community in the Pacific Northwest for a panel discussion. Rohn Amegatcher of @loghollowfarms in Tacoma, Washington, Edward "Eddie" Benote Hill, a community systems designer in Portland, and Melony Edwards of @willowoodfarm on Whidbey Island, north of Seattle, were all there to speak about their experiences in farming while black.

Before the panel began, event organizer, Lane Selman took the mic. Lane is a power woman who is known for her expertise in all things local food and farming, and she organizes panels and speaks publicly on the regular. But tonight, with the mic shakily in hand, she said a few words to the crowd off the cuff.

She explained how in the local farming community, she is known for being in-the-know. Considering the network of farmers, plant breeders, chefs, and foodies that she has brought together through the Culinary Breeding Network, she most definitely is. And yet, she described, when it became her job to organize this panel, she realized that she had actually never met a black farmer, didn't know of any black farmers, and that she now realized that she had never thought twice about it. She lamented how uncomfortable it felt to be a white woman organizing a panel of black farmers and being completely in the dark on how to move forward. Every email, every piece of correspondence that she made to organize the event, was an emotionally exhausting experience embedded with ignorance and shame. With honesty, acceptance, and vulnerability in the air, Lane said, "I guess I don't know anything about farming while black, because all I know is farming while white."

And Lane is not alone. To celebrate local food in Oregon as things are currently is to also celebrate whiteness. Taking that first uncomfortable, vulnerable step into unknown territory is

a much-needed step for white folks in the long process of true emancipation and racial equity, both in agriculture and beyond. Lane's honesty seemed to be appreciated by the panelists, and she turned toward her first question—"What does farming mean to you?"

Melony Edwards, farm manager at Willowood Farm said, "I don't know about answering questions right now, but..." She went on to explain how she has been to many conferences and events in the PNW farming community where she is the only person of color in the room, and that often times she hears speakers say that they are there to talk about the environment, not social justice. She said, "What I need is for all of you, when you hear someone say that, I need you to call them out."

There is growing criticism that local food movements address environmental issues but continue to keep social justice issues separate from the environmental conversation despite their inextricable interconnection. To be an ethical consumer or producer who only values half of the equation has been the norm in alternative food movements across the country, and the approach must be addressed as a hollow one.

Properly unenthused with the questions written for them, the panelists carried the evening forward, passing the mic around and sharing their experiences and perspectives as black farmers, sometimes speaking directly to the black community present, sometimes to the white community, and sometimes to everyone.

We have come to a time where there is no other option but to focus on the racial inequalities and shortcomings of the alternative food movements that we idolize. It is time for our communities to brainstorm how to redistribute agency, wealth, and resources to those who have been systematically excluded access. And most importantly, it is important to promote and engage in community events like these that bring excluded voices back to the table as the agents of change in a system that was built against them.

If you are a person of color who is interested in farming, just looking for community, or in need of a safe space, the BIPOC farming community is there for you. Rohn Amegatcher of

@loghollowfarms specifically emphasized that in the Pacific Northwest, the chances of a white person running into a person of color is higher than the chance that people of color will run into each other, and to please send people his way if we came across them. He is there for you.

If you are not a person of color and you are interested in figuring out how to do your part in uprooting racism and seeding sovereignty in the food system, consider your problematic position thoroughly and always. The charming panelist Edward “Eddie” Benote Hill, added, “I need you to align with me, to be an accomplice in crime with me.” It is a crime to be black in this country, a crime to have access to the same privileges that the dominant population has access to, and therefore a much-needed crime to truly do something that structurally and politically alters our institutions.

Going off of that, Amani added, “We don’t want a hand out, we want a hand in.” She asked the audience to earnestly question what their intentions really are when they want to “help” people of color, and whether or not they just want to feel needed. It’s important that we recognize where the agency is when we use a word like “help.” For me to help you, I must utilize some privilege that I have and you do not, rather than doing something for our collective benefit, or something that would actually result in you accessing the same privileges that I do —ie. structural change.

As Lane exemplified, these are unknown waters for many people. We do not have the words, experience, skills, or communication tools to conceptualize, accept, and openly discuss the racism that permeates us. First and foremost, the courage that it took for the panelists to speak about their experiences battling racism within our local food communities is precisely what we need to be celebrating. In addition, I also applaud Lane for openly and vulnerably addressing her shame over her blind spots. As Rohn later said at the Small Farm Conference, “white folks are the other end of the handshake.” In that same vein as Lane, I think I should be forthcoming about my blind spots, or at least the ones I’m currently aware of.

I want to address how uncomfortable it feels to be a white woman writing about an event that sort of wasn’t meant for me, even though it sort of was. To take authorship is to take authority,

and the way that I perceived this evening and presented it to you here is limited to my white, Oregonian perspective. Each piece of writing is most definitely a selective and exclusionary process. I do not know what this event meant for the people of color who were there to experience it nor am I claiming to. I only know my experience, and I hope my representation is respectful.

At the event itself, I did a couple things that I question myself about. When I first got there, I did what I always do at an event—book it to a seat that looks good and claim it with my jacket before diving into the drink line. I took care to not take a seat near the front to respect making space for people of color, as I felt the event was more for them to connect with each other and hear Soul Fire Farm’s message than it was for me to learn.

But after I got food and was mingling with friends that I ran into from the (white) farming community, I started to notice that a lot more people of color were filing in, questioned myself for taking notice of such a thing, and then noticed that there weren’t any chairs left. *Should I move my stuff? Or is it worse to move my stuff? I don’t know.* To be on the safe side, I took my jacket off the chair and moved to the bench along the wall. I don’t recall who took the seat. It doesn’t matter. I don’t know if there was a right thing to do. But I think it’s important to be sensitive in a world dominated by racial hierarchies either way, even if I fumble through it awkwardly like a social encounter at middle school. We have to do that to grow up.

That little back and forth happened about ten other times during the evening, and throughout my graduate work it has happened on a daily basis. Despite how infinitesimal it is compared to what people of color express experiencing and dealing with every day, radicalization is a very energetically and emotionally expensive process. And I don’t think that coming to an answer is really the point when I argue awkwardly with myself in that way, but I think that the act of trudging through it is important for people who acknowledge their own limited perspectives.

Being uncomfortable is important. Discomfort is important. As some therapist somewhere once told me, “the most growth happens outside the comfort zone.” One cannot snap their fingers and end racism, as Amani emphasized. It seems that it will be a very long process of engaging

with the unknown, processing the discomfort, and re-centering our perspectives each time we are exposed to new ones.

This event exemplifies the sort of radical conversation that local food communities need to be having with each other. We need to openly address structural racism within the food system, not just within industrial agriculture but within local agriculture, and within ourselves as individuals. We need to openly, vulnerably, and actively address the structural racism built into our own patterns of thought and behavior, regardless of how woke you think you are.

Even now, as I wrap this story up, I doubt myself. Am I taking up too much space? Is it appropriate to write on this subject? I hope that it is clear that the voices of the panelists are the ones to be heard. I see my role as assisting in the serious alignment of the mainstream environmental movement with environmental justice. If there was something that I could do to be an accomplice in the crime of uprooting racism and seeding sovereignty, I hope writing about this event is one way I can. In a moment of transition during the evening, Shannon looked out onto the crowd and said something to the effect of,

“I feel like I can see such amazing learning and healing in all of your faces, it’s like, happening in real time. It’s really beautiful.”

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[Oregon State’s 2019 Small Farm Conference—*Back to the Root*](#)

This year’s annual Small Farm Conference was held on a late Saturday in February. The plenary session kicked off with a few words from Director Gary Stevenson. He first gave a shout-out to the event’s sponsors, the largest of which being Northwest Farm Credit Services, and then moved along to give respects for the Indigenous land that we were on. “We have to take care of this place, ‘cause those guys are going to get it back one of these days,” he exclaimed.

Next, he moved on to get to know who was at this year's conference and had various groups of people stand up for an applause. First came the farmers market managers, government and university employees, and military veterans, the last of which received the grandest clap. After them came farmers under 35, then all farmers, and finally, everyone who attended the Back to the Root conference the day before.

The *Back to the Root: 2019 Pacific Northwest Black Growers Conference* was led by and provided for people of color in the small farming community. This was the first year that the Small Farm Conference helped to create a space for people who have been historically excluded from the dominant population, connect with each other and learn about resources, talk about the contributions of their ancestors to sustainable agriculture, and imagine the kind of future that they need to support them in being a part of making successful structural changes to our institutions. The conference was held the day before the Small Farm Conference specifically to encourage and welcome more people of color within the farming community to attend.



There was such an overwhelming interest of people of color within the local farming community thirsty for just such a space that @blackfoodpdx needed help providing funding for additional participants' attendance and travel costs. @blackfoodpdx reached out to the local farming community on Instagram to get donations via Kickstarter, and within a single day they met their goal. Connections that were made the night of the Farming While Black talk proved fruitful as the Culinary Breeding Network became a bridge between the local black farming community and the dominant (white) local farming community.

CBN shared the Kickstarter on their Instagram in addition to many other locavores for the first time. Some white-owned local small farms didn't share the post, but rather donated to the Kickstarter themselves, such as Uprising Seeds based out of Bellingham, Washington, whose social media page has wholly embraced migrant issues and political action as a part of their locavore identity, "dedicated to diversity & rebuilding just food systems for all," (@uprisingseeds).

The love and support between the two communities was glowing on social media, as seen in the following post made by @blackfoodpdx announcing that they had reached their goal.

@blackfoodpdx— *“#nextlevelsucces #soblessed Thank you everyone for your generosity and support!! @culinarybreedingnetwork All of you are incredible!!!!”*

@culinarybreedingnetwork— *“I’m so glad we could all help make your goal. Remember this is how we want to show up. This and so many other ways. Never hesitate to ask for all of us in the collective food community to be there for you.”*

@blackfoodpdx— *“ *”

Back at the conference, Stevenson continued to say that the Back to the Root conference produced some brainstorming that would hopefully change the world, and then he addressed the white people in the room and implored them to engage the people of color at the conference. Only, first he set it up by saying that often times people from European descent don’t like to talk to people they don’t already know. It sort of felt like he was saying that the barrier keeping people of color outside of the dominant small farming community was due to antisocial tendencies and not structural racism.

Gary was followed up by keynote speakers Mimo and Miranda of Urban Buds in St. Louis, Missouri. Mimo and Miranda told the beautiful story of how they met, decided to start a farm in the middle of the city together, and start a family. Even though gay marriage was illegal in Missouri at the time, they sued the state of Missouri, won, and were married. The final photo of their presentation flashed onto the big screen as if to say, this is what America’s farming family can look like—two mothers, one white, one of color, with a child and their dog. The couple was incredibly charismatic and set the tone for the day with a hopeful, radical vibe.

The first session that I attended was entitled *Black Voices in Oregon Agriculture: Sharing Our Experiences*. The session featured many of the same panelists that had been at the *Farming While Black* event the week before, and much of the same ground was covered regarding

Oregon's history of racism and the ways in which it still affects people of color today, especially those involved in agriculture.

Eddie Benote Hill was running through the history of racism in Oregon and in US, when a man of color, who we came to refer to as the General, spoke up from the back of the room. Dawning a camo military jacket, he spoke about how triggering it was to hear all of this, how it all still affects him every day, and he doesn't understand why we need to bring it up now, and it makes him feel like he needs to leave the room. All respect was given to him, but eventually, Eddie was trying to push the presentation along and the General was continuing to have a hard time.

Rohn got up and said that he's new to telling his story out loud, but he told a brief version of his trauma around a very serious hate crime committed against him, and told the General that he understands what he is talking about in a very unique way, and that just getting up and going out into the world as a black person in this country is an act of rebellion and courage. The General was sitting in the back of the room and I was near the front. As I looked back to listen to him speak, I noticed the sea of uncomfortable white faces facing forward. I wondered why they weren't looking at him while they were listening. The General had a hard time getting calmed down, so he and Eddie left the room to go to an exclusive space for people of color to connect with each other and get support for their unique traumas. Many of the panelists and members of the audience were in tears and moral was low, but Rohn told a couple bad jokes that lightened the mood so that we could move on. That lightness was necessary, but the heaviness was the point.

Alice, a white woman who is neighbors with Rohn and another panelist, was called upon to speak at one point, asked to stand up, and she said something to the extent of, "I feel like I'm not allowed to speak at events like these but I know that's not the thing, and the thing is, I know that I couldn't buy a piece of property myself, but I know five of us [white folks] and our relatives could and we need to get together and do it!" A woman of color from the audience got up and gave Alice a hug. Rohn continued to say that white folks are the other half of the handshake, and that this is all about teamwork and collaboration.

At the *Farming While Black* event in Portland, I felt like I wasn't allowed to take any time to talk to any of the panelists so that I didn't take up space that people in the black community might want. I didn't introduce myself to Amani and thank her for her words and I wish that I had. On a deeper level, I felt unwanted, like I should excuse myself from the room and from the fight and that that was what was asked of me. But as Alice said, "but I know that's not the thing."

At this conference, I didn't feel uncomfortable. I felt inspired to collaborate and work toward our collective food sovereignty and continually address the problematic elements of myself. At the end, I got to talk with a bunch of attendees and panelists and made meaningful connections.

The second session that I attended was entitled *Applying for Federal Grants: Farmers Market/Local Food Promotion Program and more!* Keeping a close eye on where radical and reflexive thought was present and where it was not, this session didn't even budge the needle on my radicalization meter. The panelists all had experience in writing and receiving federal grants for efforts related to local food systems, and yet not one of them touched on addressing the history that our governmental institutions have in discriminating against people of color in farm loan and grant applications—an issue addressed specifically by the black farming community in other room just moments before.

During the time to take questions, I raised my hand and asked, "In light of this being the conference's first year working to open up space for people of color, are conversations about race-based inequalities happening in the room when people are deciding who gets federal grants and who does not?" The answer spread across two of the panelists was a collectively awkward and drawn out no. It was said that with the current administration and budget cuts, there certainly wasn't any oversight that was promoting racial equity within the grant application process, but that some sensitivities were carried into the room by individuals themselves.

The last session that I attended was particularly interesting, entitled, *Food hubs in Oregon: What have we Learned?* The session featured panelists from across Oregon who run, direct, and

coordinate food hubs in their local communities, all of whom were white women except for the wonderful Silvia Cuesta of Adelante Mujeres based out of Forest Grove. I signed up for the session specifically to hear Silvia talk, as Adelante Mujeres was on my list to connect with. Adelante Mujeres, which means Women Rise Up, “provides holistic education and empowerment opportunities to low income Latina women and their families to ensure full participation and active leadership in the community,” (Adelante Mujeres 2019).

The entire time I was waiting for her to talk, but she was scheduled for last and every other presenter went over time. One presenter from Amber Fry of Fry Family Farm sparked my radicalization meter when she started speaking about her food hub’s labor challenges in the very same way that the Oregon Tilth piece did. She said that between grape harvest and CBD hemp harvest, she couldn’t keep workers in the heat of the season even if she paid \$15 an hour. Although this is a legitimate reality facing small farmers, the problem is still very much that labor issues are discussed solely as challenges facing small farm owners without recognizing the agency of the workers themselves who are treated as a dwindling hot commodity.

Finally, it was Silvia’s turn to present. As the Farm Business and Distributor Manager, she described how she worked offering educational entrepreneurial courses in Spanish to promote the agency of Latinx small farmers in the local community. In addition to classes, Adelante Mujeres also organized a 100-300 member CSA program and had wholesale accounts, acting as a distributor who buys produce from very small farmers, primarily Latinx women, that might only have 50 lbs. of green beans to sell in a week and nothing else, and piecing it all together into CSA boxes. For anyone who has managed a CSA program, you know how difficult a task that must be to piece together throughout the whole year. And most of the farmers are mothers who have full time jobs. But, Silvia said, growing for this program on the side allows them to make money and provide good food for their families from back yards and community gardens.

With no time for questions left at the end, I found Silvia afterward for Think with a Drink and got to talk with her for a good while. I discovered that she isn't just Silvia Cuesta of Adelante Mujeres, she was Silvia from the Beaverton Market! We've been working for the same farm at different markets for years, and she was at the marketeer training party that I organized a couple years before. We chatted for a while and daydreamed about future collaborations.

At the end of the night I was catching up with a friend who worked on a small farm up in Seattle. She spoke about how her farm was not diverse whatsoever and the owner had hired someone of color specifically to diversify the perspectives on the team. But the experience had by that person was so uncomfortable that they soon quit. They had been hired to diversify, but systems and practices were not in place to make that person feel empowered or supported.

My friend is a photographer and was also looking to work with a greater diversity of human models. Thinking back to what she saw happen at work, she was trying to imagine how she could diversify her own photography in a way that didn't make marginalized people uncomfortable like her coworker had been. She said wanted to show how all human bodies are beautiful by photographing them with sustainably grown flowers. This friend of mine is not heteronormative and she is generally quite the radical powerhouse, so I found it particularly interesting that she too was struggling to navigate the fault lines within herself and her locavore identity.

Of course, there were dozens of other sessions that I could have attended that perhaps would have shown a different ratio of radicalization than what I experienced at the conference. Radical and reflexive thought was condensed physically in some rooms and not others. However, the pattern seems clearly to be that radicalization is indeed underway, but that radicalization is confined to certain spaces and individuals, completely absent from others, and like a bad haircut, is in a rather awkward phase of growing out in others still.



Chapter III. Radicalizing Mainstream Local Food Discourse at Oregon Organics Farm

Introduction

Oregon Organics Farm is one of the most prominent local small organic farms in the Willamette Valley, and it therefore serves quite a broad audience. OOF's audience is the perfect sample of the average locavore, a mixture of radical folks, solidly progressive folks, and people who are just beginning their own navigation through radical thought in different ways.

Actors within the local food community who are already well on their way to producing radical local food discourse and inspiring political action among their audiences (ie. The Culinary Breeding Network, Uprising Seeds, Soul Fire Farm) tend to have smaller and more radical audiences themselves. When writing for any publication small or large, one must know one's audience. The OOF audience is who they are, and they set the boundaries that my experimental radical discourse works to push against. I have to meet them where they are and take them with me along the riveting journey of shifting consciousness and making unknown unknowns known. It is a delicate balance, to challenge one's identity while convincing them to keep reading when they don't have to. Somehow, I feel that I must figure out how to lure them in with pleasure without omitting the pain.

Three explorations follow my personal trajectory in attempting to radicalize the local food discourse that I produce for OOF's broad audience. The first, *The Immigrant in the Room*, told the story at the beginning of this navigation of how my love for local food was complicated with the understanding that the benefits I received from my local food community were not distributed equitably, particularly among the migrant farmworkers who locavores don't even know grow their local produce. In the story, this juxtaposition is particularly evident as the reader moves with me through a day in my life at the farm. I spend the morning harvesting with a crew of dominantly Latinx migrant workers and am faced with the power disparities between

me and my coworker Berta. I ride the harvest truck out of the fields of brown bodies to go up into the farm's office full of white bodies to write the CSA Newsletter, conflicted about the version of the farm that I represent.

While the first story largely captures my initial shift in consciousness, my frustration, and my confusion as to how I should move forward in my local food discourse production, the following exploration, *"Como una Flor" and More*, leads the reader through a series of examples of my more gentle attempts to radicalize the discourse I produced for the farm. Through excerpts from CSA newsletters, farmers market signage, menu blurbs, and social media posts, we can see how I personally tried to bring more radical thought to a general locavore audience.

The third exploration hinges around a single social media post that I made for the farm around the 2018 midterm elections. If it were to pass, measure 105, funded by outwardly racist lobbying groups, would have repealed Oregon's sanctuary state law and allowed police to act as ICE agents, thus threatening the safety, wellbeing, and livelihoods of Oregon's Latinx migrant populations, many of whom work in the fields to grow our food. The post I made was the farm's first that called upon its audience to take political action on a migrant issue and see such an action as a part of their identity and responsibility as a locavore.

As you could imagine, the post received a wide variety of feedback, mostly in support except for one comment— *"I love your produce, but can't we even keep vegetables out of politics?"* The various ways in which locavores responded to this comment, ranging from aggressive to educational and everywhere in between, serves as our point of departure to discuss the efficacy of how we communicate with each other on the edge of radical food discourse in light of the search for common ground.

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“Como una Flor” and More

In *The Immigrant in the Room* we explored where I was before I started experimenting with more radical discourse production—disenchanted, frustrated, and confused about what to do. Afterward, I continued my journey in grappling with my problematic positionality on the farm, how problematic it was that I was the voice of the farm and not one of my Latinx coworkers.

Just as I asked Berta in the scallion patch, I constantly asked my Latinx coworkers what they thought I should be writing about, what they would say if it were them, or what they thought our customers should know. But the particular folks who I worked with were not interested in communicating anything to this audience who they did not know or care about. Oftentimes people said that they didn’t know what to say, that they were just workers. I didn’t think I should just not write anything because I’m a problematic person to be doing the writing, because in this situation. I felt that if I didn’t seize the opportunity then nobody else would.

It became clear to me that it was my personal desire to include my Latinx coworkers in the public eye, and that as long as they were okay with being included, it was my job to figure out how to do it appropriately and what stories to tell. I wasn’t sure how to go about it. I worried that drawing any attention to my Latinx coworkers’ presence on the farm might bring the wrong type of attention, and I felt wholly uncomfortable being in the position to decide whether or not they were represented as a part of the image of the farm.

I maintained constant communication with the women who I worked with every day, telling them what I was writing about and asking when it was okay to post pictures. After I would post something on social media or in a CSA newsletter, I would show some of my Latinx coworkers how many people liked the post and translate all the supportive comments from our customers. Some people got very excited and asked me to text them the photo and thanked me for showing them. Some people shrugged it off and didn’t say much at all. But the overall response was one of positivity. I was reminded of what Silvia Fabela said in *A New Food Activism* about her time as the communications director with “a national coalition of workers and community members” called *Making Change at Walmart* (Alkon and Guthman 2017).

“I wish that every Walmart employee could go to an ally meeting.... Because they could see that their communities supported them. Really and truly, the people that they live next door to really do support them and are willing to stand behind them, want to stand behind them, and that it’s just not all in their head. Every time I leave a meeting, I’m always like, ‘God, I wish I could just bring my store here.’ Once that happens, man, Walmart’s in trouble. As soon as workers find out that they really have the power, Walmart’s in trouble,” (Alkon and Guthman 2017).

This section covers examples of my attempts to radicalize the discourse that I produced for the farm more passively through simply including my Latinx coworkers rather than omitting them from the public image of the farm. This served not only to educate the audience about the role of migrant labor in their local food system, but to help some of my Latinx coworkers feel supported. It’s not until the final section that we see an example of radical discourse that actually calls upon the locavore audience to move beyond voting with their forks and take political action on a migrant issue, or rather, a collective sovereignty issue.

Much of my work in radicalizing local food discourse production at Oregon Organics Farm occurred in writing on their blog and social media, as well as in person at the farmers market, both places that have predominantly held tight to their progressive ways of thought. This work was largely in the form of written blog posts, social media posts, farmers market signage, menu blurbs, and CSA Newsletters. We’ll explore a few key examples from each format and the ways in which different venues differed in their radical flexibility.

CSA Newsletters

My CSA newsletters are designed to do many things. The front of the paper is topped with a witty title and the week number is up in the corner. Along the left side of the page is the Table of Box Contents, which lists every item in the box and includes vegucation information ranging anywhere from product descriptions to botanical histories to cooking suggestions. I generally fill

that in first, whereas the right side of the page that is to contain the week's narrative and waits to be written until last. I used to let the conversations that took place across the sample table at the farmers market provide the spark for my newsletters, but these days all my inspiration seems to come from the Latinx women that I work with in the fields.

Grappling with the deep desire to produce heavily radical, educational, and political discourse, with the need to portray the farm in a beautiful light as an employee, the need to bring the role of migrant labor in our local food systems into the fore, and the essential need to respect the agency of the people around me as an anthropologist, radicalizing the CSA newsletters became challenging and wrought with anxiety.

I knew that my final products of so called radical discourse were pressed through many filters that resulted in purely beautiful stories, absent of the challenges faced by migrant workers. I didn't want my audience to think, "Oh, there are migrant workers on my favorite local farm, look how happy they are, yay." I just wanted to plant a seed in folks' minds that perhaps there are people in their local food community who they didn't realize existed before. I am very critical of my work and always look for ways in which I could do better. The following work is successful in some ways and problematic in others, as goes life on the edge of radicalization.

September 4th, Week 13: "Como Una Flor"—The Art of Making Beautiful Bunches

"On this particular day, we had a lot of new people on the crew and we spent our day learning and teaching how to make beautiful, even bunches. For beets and other round roots, we are told to make bunches como una flor, like a flower, with one beet in the center and an array of beets around it. As we harvest, we make sure to gently pull the beets from the soil so as not to damage the delicate greens of the smaller beets that we leave behind to keep growing...

But that's just beets! Every single item that we bunch has its own science and art to it. To bunch chard, we wade through the field of bright, rainbow leaves, try to find leaves that are of similar size, and then stack them one on top of the other with a little slap that keeps them from being a floppy mess. To bunch moss parsley, we make sure to rotate the bunch as we

make it, forming a perfect little pom pom as we go. To bunch basil, we snap a few stems at a basal node with one hand, always placing the new stems in the center of the bunch so as not to bruise the soft leaves. Carrots fall easily off the bunch, so we always have to make sure to twist the tie around the bunch twice super tight. For cilantro we slip a long knife under the soil to cut under the root, remove the weeds, and bunch from there.

Whatever bunch you're making, your twist tie can't be too low or too high, too tight or too loose; the orientation of the leaves and roots must be just so, so that it turns out beautiful every time. Over the next few weeks as more and more bunched items make it into your box, remember that somebody worked hard to make sure that that one bunch was perfect and beautiful, como una flor."



Figure 3. Gold beets at Oregon Organics Farm, bunched como una flor—photo by Laura Bennett

September 11th, Week 14: Dropping Knowledge, Word by Word

"Whenever I sit down to write this newsletter, the conversations that took place while we harvested your produce starts fluttering through my mind. More than any one particular conversation, I wanted to draw attention to the amazing language immersion experience that one has on our harvest crew. While we're sharing immense amounts of knowledge about how to harvest vegetables properly, in doing so we are also exchanging immense amounts of language in order to get the job done.

Our 2018 harvest crew is an incredibly diverse bunch of folks, all of whom speak different combinations of languages. There are those who speak Spanish and English to varying degrees, those who speak either Spanish or English, and then there are Spanish speakers who speak indigenous languages, including Mixteco from Mexico, and Mam and Kanjobal, both

Mayan languages from Guatemala. Some people have been farming their whole lives, some for the past decade, and others are experiencing farm life for the first time.

At the beginning of the season, it felt like the language barrier hindered efficiency, but the barrier has since been broken. Over this season, everyone has learned so much English and Spanish, and a few select language buffs have even taken to learning the differences and similarities between the indigenous languages. For me, I have honed my Spanish abilities to a whole new level that is simply not possible in a classroom. But what's more important than the words we've learned has been the relationships that we've built with each other as we laughed and grumbled our way through communication breakdowns and successes, just as any good learning process should be.

As you eat your way through your box this week, remember the diversity of words that passed through the air as we harvested, the words that made possible the logistics of assuring quality control and efficiency as we moved from field to field, the words that maybe didn't make sense the first time and had to be laughed off and said again before they got the message across. As we have spent our days working our bodies in the fields, our minds have been far from dormant. It's been one stimulating season of knowledge exchange, and I wouldn't trade it for the world."

The following comments were emailed to the farm in response to week 14.

"Please thank Laura for that lovely piece in the newsletter about language and connection and community. I love eating the delicious produce you grow, but the real joy of being a CSA member is knowing that our food is grown in a way that nurtures rather than exploits those whose labor feeds us."—Locavore A

"Hey Laura, Once again, your letter paints a rich context in which our delicious vegetables are tended and harvested. We know that soil, seeds, light and water are part of the process as well as labor at so many stages. But adding the challenges and delights of languages and communication helps to

complete ones understanding of the process. Thanks, again, for taking the time to make these letters a delight to read. —Locavore B”

“Can you please pass the word to Laura that I am appreciating her articles in the newsletter so much this year. She's a great writer...And a bit thought provoking as well I look forward as much to the newsletter as to the veg each week. —Locavore C”

Of course, hearing these words makes me feel all warm and fuzzy inside. I see locavores who are receptive and radicalizing their locavore identity, locavores who could be excellent allies in worker-led efforts if called upon. In this way, I see these newsletters as successful, inspiring a gentle but essential shift in consciousness needed in our local food community. There is likely a time and a place for soft radicalization and perhaps writing to this broad audience is it.

But that warm sensation fades away real quick, and instead becomes replaced by guilt. I told two beautiful stories, and all my audience saw was beauty. As was expected, one locavore responded by assuming that her “food is grown in a way that nurtures rather than exploits those whose labor feeds us.” But this is not what I said. Labor management practices on local small farms are often just as problematic as on industrial farms, as we learned in *Labor and the Locavore*. And furthermore, migrant farmworkers are exploited by the United States in a plethora of policy-enforced ways beyond the specific working conditions that they experience.

The second CSA customer who emailed in seemed to have a more realistic understanding, saying that “adding the challenges and delights of languages and communication helps to complete ones understanding of the process” of how our food is grown. Their comment implies that they know that they don’t know everything from what I wrote, but that they appreciate learning more. The third customer sees my newsletters simply as “thought provoking” and says that she looks forward to them just as the weekly produce. This tells me not only that her thoughts have been provoked, but that she is enjoying it rather than being put off by it.

Social Media

In general, I would say that social media platforms offer themselves up to radicalization (and pushback to it) easier than CSA newsletters do. I'm not sure the science behind it, but that's how it feels in my experience. On *Instagram*, Oregon Organics Farm has just over 4,500 followers, a quarter of which live in Portland and 10% of whom live in Corvallis. Almost half of the audience are ages 25-34, and third are 35-44. About two thirds of them identify as women, and the remaining third identify as men. On *Facebook*, the farm has just over 7,000 followers, with similar age ranges and gender distribution. The following posts in the process of radicalization all performed well above average on both Instagram and on Facebook in overall engagement, reach, number of likes and comments, etc, and are listed chronologically. Their high levels of audience engagement suggest that the efficacy of the message was high.

Just to contextualize things, remember that post that I quoted in the section on *Six Seasons and other Sexy Foodie Vibes*? That one that alluded to a Ludacris song and promoted valuing the diversity of produce that the Pacific Northwest has to offer? "Stop, drop, kaboom, baby, we've got tomatoes!" Well, this late May post received the highest number of comments on Instagram out of all other posts in 2018, had the 6th highest overall engagement, and the 7th highest number of likes. The post was creative and aligned with many of the environmental values of the broad locavore audience, but radical it was not.

A little over a month later came the Fourth of July, which proved to be an excellent opportunity to push a little radical thought into locavore minds. But of course, reactions to social media posts often have very little to do with the words and have everything to do with the photo. This post was certainly powerful both in its image and its words.

"Yesterday, like all Wednesdays, was carrot day on our farm. For most tasks we disperse across the farm to get everything done on the day's itinerary, but our seemingly endless carrot harvest requires all hands on deck. Say hellow to some of the amazing people who bring our

produce to life! This is how we spent our Independence Day—together, joking around in Spanglish, and pulling sweet roots out of the soil.”



Figure 4. Carrot day/ Fourth of July at Oregon Organics Farm—photo by Laura Bennett

This post performed above average across the board. Its average reach on Facebook was about 20% above average, while engagement was over double the average post, as it received far more shares and comments, such as,

“You guys are the best!”

“Gracious!”

“Thank you to all the hard workers that help grow food.”

“You make the best carrots. They are like a perfect apple. Sweet and light with lots of crunch. Most backyard gardeners can produce a tomato or zucchini, but carrots are elusive. So many hats off to you!”—Brian Parks, chef & owner of Bellhop in Corvallis

On Instagram, the post gained even more traction, becoming the second most engaging post of the year with the second highest number of likes. It ranked #7 for having the most number of comments, such as,

“Love it!! 🥰”

“Love to each one here!”

“❤️❤️❤️👏”—Portland restaurant, Verde Cocina

“🥰🥰🥰👏👏👏👏👏 love seeing these faces!!”—@loveshovel, Portland’s Shannon Sims of Food, Art, Love

“Thank you to everyone!”

What’s so interesting about this post is how much is said without saying it. On the edge of radical discourse production, I always find myself wanting to say something incredibly radical, as if I’m screaming it through a megaphone like Dolores Huerta, but I always feel the need to tone my radical thoughts down and take my audience through the baby steps on the way toward recognizing and addressing the race- and class-based inequalities in the world and in their beloved local food system. Utilizing timing, the softer post seems to be able to pack a harder punch. Strong tension and meaning are created by posting something on the Fourth of July about working together with who the audience can assume are migrant workers. I felt like I caught the audience in a moment where they were particularly open to embracing radical thought.

These next two posts were made on Saturdays at the Portland State farmers market, and both emphasise the concept of “the hands that feed,” without explicitly stating who those hands

"Tis the season of icy fingers and mud-brick boots. A HUGE thanks to all the hands that picked this beautiful fall produce 🍷🍷🍷 #handsthatfeed."

"ATTA ATTA ATTA ATTA ATTA ATTA ATTA ATTA ATTA ATTA"

⇒ **SALAD MIX** ⇐

\$11.00/lb. or \$6.50/pre-bag

In the summer, we harvest salad mix at light speed, cutting full handfuls of leaves at a time. But this time of year it's slim-pickin's in freezing, muddy fields. **A HUGE THANKS TO THE HANDS THAT HARVEST**

The second post seen in figure 5 highlighting the hands that feed gained a lot more traction than the first. This

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example is a two-in-one discourse product, as I first wrote the radical message on a sign directly over the salad basket at the farmers market, and then took a photo and posted it on Instagram. This piece continues to get the audience thinking more about the labor behind their produce, but again does so without explicitly naming who those laborers might be.

“It might be December but we’re still here slingin vibrant winter veg! It is cold cold cold out in the fields and standing here at market, but nothing this beautiful happens without hard work. Today we’ve got a gorgeous winter salad mix laboriously picked, the one and only ✨puntarelle ✨, a plethora of roots, and greens that are as sweet as can be now that it’s gettin chilly ❄️ #hardcorefarming #handsthatfeed #winterfarming #organicfarming #farmlife #marketlife #eatseasonal #slinginveg #knowyourfarmer #portlandfarmersmarket.”

This post ranked very highly on Instagram, having the 2nd highest number of comments, the 3rd highest number of likes, and the 4th highest level of engagement in 2018. However, similar to the first post, most of the comments revolved around the bounty of the vegetables. The image seen in figure 3 was the first of a series of photos from market that day, and many of the comments responded to them, such as, “Those braided carrots, tho!!” and “Whaaaaattttt??? Puntarelle!!! Pleeeeaassee tell me you’ll have that next weekend?!” A few comments valued the labor that went into the salad mix, but it seemed that the post did not get locavores to question who that labor was performed by.

“Love that salad mix sign, so very true this time of year!”

“Thanks for the speaking truth about the winter harvest!”

The discourse produced in these social media posts was gently radical in some ways while remaining dominantly progressive in others. Although some of these posts expand the customer’s understanding of the local organic products they buy by valuing the human labor involved in their production, nothing is mentioned about the hands that harvest being migrant

hands. However, in the Fourth of July post that actually contained a photo of Latinx migrant workers, the message came through stronger without the explicit use of words.

Overall, the progressive posts were simply dipping their toes into radical waters and were successful in some ways and problematic in others. But one post that I've yet to mention went beyond soft radicalization, calling on the audience to take political action on a migrant issue, and received more engagement than any of the farm's other Facebook posts in 2018. The varying responses to this post, and the responses to those responses will serve as our point of departure to discuss the how we communicate with one another on the edge of radicalization.

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[“But can’t we even keep vegetables out of politics?”](#)

Across the nation, the 2018 midterms saw the highest voter turnout in a hundred years (Stewart 2018). Reaching nearly 50% citizen participation, the United States has not seen a turnout this high since the 1960's when the country was undergoing a civil rights movement on par with what we see today.

In Oregon, voter turnout reached just over 60% (Hammond 2018) and there were many controversial measures on the line. Measure 105 was no exception, calling for Oregon's sanctuary state law to be repealed. The law “limits the cooperation of local law enforcement with federal immigration enforcement,” (Ballotpedia 2018) and the removal of it would allow law enforcement to essentially act as ICE agents and embrace racial profiling, threatening the rights and livelihoods of Oregon's Latinx community.

The 2018 midterm elections served as the catalyst to take my radical food discourse to the next level. It was a Saturday morning in late October, and I was behind the booth shoving a breakfast

burrito into my face as I wrote the farm's first social media post that took a stance on a political issue—a migrant issue, that I wanted locavores to see as an environmental issue as well. Despite kicking myself for being so unradical, I didn't want to overstep by aligning the farm publicly with a political stance without the owners' permission. So, I decided which one would most likely be down, called him, and got the okay to go forward with the post. The owner himself wasn't aware of Measure 105, which is a problem considering he employs migrant workers. But I suppose in his defense, I regret to admit that I didn't pay particular attention to the measure before it was brought up in class at the university.

I was taking a Migrant Health class at the time and had made a presentation entitled, "Organic is not enough." I spoke about the disconnect between ethical consumers and migrant workers despite their dependence on each other, and how consumers seem to unknowingly care a whole lot more about their own health than about migrant health, as had become clear to me throughout the course.

A fellow student, Priscila Narcio, the *Here to Stay* President of Oregon State University, raised her hand after my presentation saying that she loved the idea of "organic is not enough" and had just used it in a post on *Here to Stay*'s Facebook page to make a call for action to vote no on Measure 105.

"Oregonians, enjoy your apple ciders and apple pies this fall. Immigrants farmed, pruned, and picked those apples. Eating organic is not enough. Vote NO on Measure 105,"(Narcio 2018a) .

Compared to other posts on *Here to Stay*'s page which get one to five shares on average, this one went viral in a way that

none of my softly radical posts had. When we saw each other in class the next day, Priscila leaned over excitedly and showed me on her phone that the post had been shared nearly a



Figure 6. *Here to Stay* Facebook post screenshot

thousand times! She was not the only one that this concept struck a chord with. This was a post that really did something. This was a post that tied immigration issues to locavore identity in an incredibly successful way. Brilliant! Two days later, she used the same technique again, connecting Oregon's wine identity and an economic argument with immigrant issues. Although it didn't reach the staggering shares that this post did, it was still shared and engaged with far above average for the page. The same technique was repeated once more with hops.

"Oregonians take pride in winemaking. The grape harvest is especially important to wineries all over Oregon that generate \$5.61 billion in economic impact, with wine tourism revenue more than doubling to \$787 million. Who are working in the fields? Immigrants. Vote NO on 105," (Narcio 2018c).

"Love craft beer? The Pacific Northwest is the largest producer of hops in the world. Phrases such as "farm to table" or "locally sourced" does not consider immigrant farm workers. Oregonians: Have you voted yet? Vote NO on Measure 105," (Narcio 2018b).

Inspired by these radical posts, I knew that I had to try to do something similar. Bigger farms like us who employ migrant labor should be using their power to fight for immigrant rights politically, and locavores would likely care deeply about the people growing their food if they knew they existed. But using the farm's platform to promote a specific political agenda on immigration had never been done at OOF. There were some political posts in 2012 back when getting GMO canola banned from the valley was the rage, but no social justice agendas had ever been promoted. We serve a broad customer base and getting too political or even too botanical results in losing people. As I drafted my post, I wondered what the public reactions would be.

On the cool Saturday morning of October 27th, less than two weeks before the ballot boxes would close, standing amidst the horde of wealthy locavores who flood our booth before the bell rings the market into commencement, I started typing out a different kind of post. Well, I typed out and deleted what I typed a few times over, worried about the problematic nature of my own position as a white person talking about migrant issues, and the problematic nature of

the words that I chose, and the reality that I didn't ask any of my Latinx coworkers how they would feel. At some point, the ravenous Portland shoppers had depleted the salad bowl and it needed filling and I just needed to post and drop it. This is what I ended up coming up with.

"Thanks to our amazing crew, we've got a ton of new fall gems that have emerged from the mud including sunchokes, celery, parsnips, and black radishes. But eating organic is not enough. Vote NO on measure 105 to keep Oregon a sanctuary state and fight for the rights of those who feed us. #noimmigrantsnofood"

Just as when *Here to Stay* made their posts connecting local food with migrant issues, this post saw a vast increase in engagement compared to the average post on both of the farm's social media platforms, taking second place for the farthest-reaching post of 2018 on Instagram and first place on Facebook. On Instagram, the post only had the 14th highest number of likes and comments. But Facebook had twice the level of average engagement, was shared 29 times (the average being 1) and had 35 comments. The amazing lessons to be gleaned from this post lie within these comments.

Eleven of the twelve initial reaction comments were in full support of the message. *"Bravo, OOF! Way to take a stand,"* one person said. *"Great post! No on 105!"* said another. *"Thanks for posting! No on 105 🇺🇸,"* yet another commented, in addition to a full blown *"hell yeah, NO ON 105!"* Priscila shared the post on *Here to Stay's* page, saying, *"Thank you Oregon Organics Farm in Philomath, OR for taking a stance for NO on Measure 105!"*

When prompted, locavores were showing their support for a migrant issue and saw its intimate connection with their own locavore identities. But that last comment, that one out of twelve that I mentioned before—it wasn't so supportive and resulted in a comment stream of its own.

"I love your produce but can't we even keep vegetables out of politics?"

Let that just sink in a moment. "I love your produce," they say, "but can't we even keep vegetables out of politics?" Well, no, actually we can't, for a whole lot of reasons. Clearly, this

person did not get the point. How should one respond to such a comment? What do you feel? Do you feel angry? Frustrated? A bit triggered? Do some of you feel like you can empathize with her sentiment, or at least part of it? Or not at all? Perhaps you felt like Walter did. He was the first to comment.

“So says the voice of white privilege. How convenient for you to be so above politics. I have news for you: everything is political, and wherever there are groups of people, there will be politics.”

Walter might be the most loyal regular shopper at our booth in Portland. He is always the first one there to bag up the best of the best before the market begins. At PSU, we aren’t allowed to make any transactions before the market bell rings, so once Walter has collected his haul, he holds down the front of the line and waits for the bell, turning around to tell newbies who come up behind him what the deal is and that he is the front of the line. He’s a super nice guy.

But this one day, the farm received an email from an upset Walter. Apparently, he had been cut in line the Saturday before, and he was upset about the way that the manager handled it. I was at market that day when a visibly mentally unstable man approached the booth to shop. When he cut Walter in line, the market manager went with it and completed the transaction for the unstable man first, feeling that this was the best course of action to take for all involved. But Walter was not happy. He waits at the front of that line every Saturday, and I guess he couldn’t let it go. He submitted an official complaint about the manager to the farm.

We all still see Walter every Saturday, and he and the manager worked everything out. Everything’s fine. But anyway, the twelfth locavore respondent and Walter continued to back and forth for quite some time, and for some reason I could not help but think back to that email that Walter sent that day. The locavore’s response to the comment above is as follows:

“Walter... I asked for vegetables to be above politics. And this kind of aggressive, ridiculing, smarty pants, I know it all better than you comment is why so many people had it... No, not everything is political, thank God, some things are just veggies..”

The throw-down eventually leads to this message from Walter, to which the locavore stopped responding.

"I see you're a Realtor. Your trade association is heavily & aggressively political. Pushes hard against environmental regulation, land use laws, transaction taxes, etc. 50 years ago they fought tooth & nail to defeat the Fair Housing Act which made it a crime to discriminate in housing based on race, religion etc. What if you wanted to sell my house and I were to say "Well, I don't know if I should hire you. You and your National Association of Realtors are too political. You people should just stick to selling houses!" You wouldn't like that very much now, would you?"

The first comment that Walter made is pretty much the exact same sassy line that ran through my head when I read the plea to keep vegetables out of politics — *"So says the voice of white privilege."* But I generally try to keep comments like that to a minimum and remain calm and diplomatic, particularly when I'm acting as the face of the farm. But because I know that I tend to play it safer, to communicate more gently, I often look up to people like Walter who just blurt out what they're thinking, and my first reaction to his comment is, *preach!* I think we both fulfill valuable roles to be played in the process of radicalizing our local food systems.

But as they continued back and forth, I found myself looking up to Walter less and less and feeling more like I was watching some juicy Jerry Springer plot unfold. Instead of locavores coming together to discuss the importance of these issues, I saw schoolyard arguments and personal attacks being made, ultimately culminating in Walter looking into the locavore's Facebook page for personal information to utilize.

On the one hand, I see the analogy that Walter drew in his last comment as legitimate, but it was certainly packaged in an aggressive way and ultimately served to push the other locavore out of the local food community. She no longer shops at the booth or follows us on social media. Many people might say, *good, we don't need people like that!* And maybe they'd be right. But I have to wonder, is there a better way that we could be communicating with each other? Is there more than we can do than simply express anger and cast judgement?

Calling out injustice is incredibly important, maybe now more than ever. Calling out injustice is changing the world. And yet, I can't help but think that calling out injustice is not the same as actually achieving justice itself. We need to make big structural changes in our policies and institutions. The corporate, Capitalist powers at be are big. In such dire times, I personally feel a strong need to do better than just calling out injustice in this situation. In this situation, from locavore to locavore, I felt that a more productive dialogue could have been had, one that centered around common ground and understanding rather than judgement and shaming.

Despite my initial relation to Walter's comments, I find myself much more impressed with some of the other comments that locavores made in response to their fellow locavore. Often still with a firm tone, in the following comments locavores seem to work beyond just casting judgement by attempting to further explain elements of the argument in their own words.

Locavore 1: "I think you did the same thing in objecting to the OOF post. We could just let each other speak. Certainly you are welcome to do so and so are others."

Locavore 2: "I think you might actually care about "politics" with your veggies if your access to fresh organic produce disappears and instead, rots in the field because there is no one left to harvest it. As it stands now, field workers willing to come on temporary work visas have been shrinking since ICE and draconian policy from DC have become the norm. Not to mention an increase in hate crime and possible separation from family and children. Thus, your vegetables ARE inseparable from "politics."

Locavore 3: "Food IS political. Who has access to fresh healthy food, who labors in the field to grow and harvest it, who has access to land... These are all political issues. And in this country, we are absolutely reliant on a labor force comprised primarily of immigrants who are willing to do the back-breaking work."

These three locavores attempted to make arguments that sought to further explain the point that had clearly not made its way to the twelfth locavore. After having watched this all unfold

during the day at market, I finally piped in when I got back and parked the truck the farm. In a similar vein, aiming for professionalism and respect.

“Hi Annette, thank you for your comment. We understand your frustration. We would love to keep politics out of the farming conversation, but there are many reasons why we cannot. Primarily, food eaten in the US is produced by immigrants, so politics that affect immigrants also directly affect our ability to grow food. It’s the reality of our food system. If you have any further questions regarding how measure 105 threatens food production, please don’t hesitate to ask. Thanks again.”

Over the next few days, a few others got in the last word, speaking to the way that I responded and to the way that Walter did, saying,

Locavore 4: “Thank you Oregon Organics Farm for standing up for what is right! [The respondent] is just another hurt person who doesn’t want to face the truth about how immigrant work goes into our food. Spot on! Nicely done!!”

Locavore 5: “Walter... Well said sir! I am willing to bet [the respondent] is just sick of politics, as we mostly ALL are, but she’s flat out WRONG to shoot out a knee-jerk “veg shouldn’t be political” message. Maybe, just maybe, she knows how WRONG she is after this barrage of replies. Probably not though. Being a realtor, she’s deeeep in the political miasma. As are her veggies.... whether she knows and admits it, or not.”

As I was watching all of this play out from my tiny black mirror, I couldn’t help but think about everything that was being assumed about the twelfth respondent. I don’t know that they didn’t “want to face the truth about how immigrant work goes into our food.” I felt like I was supposed to jump on the shaming bandwagon, but I felt wholeheartedly uncomfortable with hateful way that Walter and other locavores were responding. How should I respond? I’m not so sure “this barrage of replies” is really the thing to convince them that they’re not seeing the big picture. That’s never worked with anyone personally in my life ever. As a person who

studies how to enable shifts in consciousness toward a more radical understanding of the world, I am fairly certain that shaming someone is not the sharpest tool in the activist's toolbox.

When I read the twelfth comment— “I love your produce, but can't we even keep vegetables out of politics?”—my first thought is, well they certainly did not get the point. My post was supposed to point out that our produce was picked by immigrants and therefore if anyone wants to continue eating our produce then they should vote on legislation that supports immigrants. After all, *#noimmigrantsnofood*. Not that there aren't a thousand better reasons to support equity for all, but it certainly doesn't make sense to bite the hand that feeds, and perhaps more people could at least agree with that.

When I hear her say, *“but can't we even keep the vegetables out of politics?”* and I remove all consideration of immigration issues from my mind, I hear someone who is tired of politics and just wants to be able to have at least one simple pleasure. And that is something that I definitely do empathize with, just as Locavore 5 did when they said, “I am willing to bet [they're] just sick of politics, as we mostly ALL are.” Though I know quite well that no, we most definitely cannot keep the vegetables out of politics, and actually, there is little more political than these vegetables. But yeah, politics are tiring, I hear that.

But the thing is, I know that we can't keep vegetables out of politics *now*. I have to remember that I wasn't always the way that I am now, I haven't always understood the things that I do now. I can remember my transition from mainstream to locavore during my later teen years. I can remember taking rapid mental note of the political opinions that my new farm friends voiced across the lunch table and I remember feeling entirely politically ignorant in contrast. And thinking back to that version of myself, although it feels entirely uncomfortable and way too vulnerable to admit, I could absolutely see myself ignorantly lamenting, *“Ugh, can't we even keep the vegetables out of politics?”*

Then, I remember that this person is a locavore. *“I love your produce, but...”* she says. This is not only my first political post connecting local food with immigration politics, but it's one of the first of its kind aimed at the broader locavore audience. This person is part of a vast community

of locavores who have largely *never* discussed immigration in the context of their local food systems, and who have not previously viewed their locavore identity as extending into any non-“environmentally” political realms, or perhaps into any political realms at all. I was once a locavore who did not understand these things. Is this how I would have wanted someone to respond to me in my local food community? Is pushing this person out of our community the answer?

Lastly, I catch myself—I realize that I really have been assuming a lot about this person. And so have the many people who responded to her comment. I couldn’t let go of the fact that I felt that it was wrong the way that this person was shamed, and I wanted to know more about her and her experience with this social media post. I wanted to tell her more about why I thought tying in migrant issues to locavore identity was important and to see what we had in common.

So, I called her. I sent her a message on Facebook and she gave me her number and I called her. She wasn’t who I thought she’d be. I don’t know who I thought she’d be, but she wasn’t it. She was a German immigrant with a thick accent in her mid-fifties. Over the course of my interview with her, many of my assumptions were upended and I learned a lot about what we had in common. In the search for common ground, I made a list of some major opinions we shared.

1. Supporting local food is important for environmental and individual health.
2. Food is too cheap in this country, which is a factor in farm labor exploitation.
3. Farm labor exploitation is wrong; Labor exploitation anywhere is wrong.
4. Local food systems tend to only address environmental exploitation and has historically not addressed social justice concerns.
5. Farm labor laws need to be structurally changed to keep workers safe and healthy.
6. Immigration laws in the US are extremely strict and racist and need structural change.
7. The way that we talk to each other can hinder these structural changes from happening.
8. Perhaps we cannot separate vegetables from politics, and my post was of value.

To be clear, I could have made a much longer list of all of the subjects that this person and I disagreed on. I definitely had to pick my battles. But I chose not to focus on that right now. By

the end of our conversation, we knew we were really different people, but we communicated well and were able to have a productive conversation about things we disagreed on. Of course, my main intention for the interview as an anthropologist was to hear about her experience in the social media post, which I learned did make her feel very uncomfortable and result in her unfollowing the farm on social media and no longer shopping with us at the farmers market. She said that if she ever found out that one of her children spoke to someone the way that Walter spoke to her that she would tell them it was an unacceptable way to treat people.

By the end of our conversation, I think that she felt very heard, and I was able to ask again about how she felt about my post. I further explained why I thought it was really important to start having conversations that do merge these political issues into our local food discourse and asked if she still didn't agree with me or if she could maybe see the value in the post that I made. She said,

"I agree with you one hundred percent... "We have a lot in common. Really, a lot. And that's what we should be focusing on when we're solving a problem, and not cursing people out. This is primitive."

This was exciting to hear, and when we parted ways she told me that if I ever wanted to talk with her again she would be happy to talk with me. A few weeks later, she sent me a message on Facebook that read,

"Thanks for the talk. If more people would have that kind of exchange this whole mess would be solvable..."

I promise, I did not pay this woman to say what I wanted to hear. But hot damn, that is what I wanted to hear! Of course, it doesn't mean that she and I are immediately on the same page about everything, or even about this single issue. It takes more than 45 minutes to make social change and build community. But significant progress was made during our conversation nonetheless, both in the way of making radical shifts in consciousness and simply by finding common ground and empathizing with the humanity in each other's perspectives.

When Trump was elected and everyone was talking about how we all need to have conversations with people who think differently than we do, how did we imagine those conversations taking place? In what ways does more aggressive communication work to promote justice? In what ways does compassionate communication compromise on justice?

This story serves as the jumping off point for us all to reflect on the way that we talk to each other when we disagree with each other as we most certainly will in navigating the radical fault lines of our local food systems. Where is it important to take a stance and strongly oppose those who think differently? Where is it appropriate or more effective to meet people where they are and try to find common ground? When is finding common ground compromising on social justice, and when is it a more efficient path toward achieving collective sovereignty?

From my experiences in watching my local food community experience radicalization in real time to attempting to radicalize local food discourse, I have found that avoiding jumping on the shaming bandwagon and searching for common ground is a highly effective method to successfully getting a radical point across to people. That isn't to say that I haven't strongly stated what I think is right when needed, but it means that I think I communicate a little more effectively in sacrificing the catharsis of "cursing people out."

In a recent New York Times article entitled *The Industrial Revolution of Shame: Outrage is strange bait: It can feel wrong not to take it*, the efficacy of quick judgment is explored (Scibona 2019). The author reminds us how important it has been for marginalized people to voice outrage and "assert their judgement that something was wrong and had to change," in many social justice revolutions, "Yet technology has so multiplied the outrages confronting us that they crowd our ability to discuss much else."

As I stated before, I felt like I was supposed to jump on the shaming bandwagon that Walter started, and it felt risky to offer angry locavores anything else other than confirmation of their anger. I don't want to defend someone who I shouldn't. But perhaps I look at the situation more like a writer than as a citizen. As explored in *The Industrial Revolution of Shame*,

throughout the narrative literature there are profound examples of how authors work so hard to make us connect with the humanity inside even the worst of characters (Scibona 2019).

“[Authors] have the skill of deep watching. When they describe in detail a conflict that cries out for us to take a side but hold back from explicitly taking a side themselves, they are not overlooking the moral stakes. They are compelling a moral response from us that’s more challenging than approval or disapproval. Under the influence of their restraint, our conscience is engaged in a new way, as a witness... Freed from the responsibility to deliver a verdict, or new role is to separate assumption from knowledge.”

Thinking back to compassionate communication workshops I’ve taken, I think about what it means to make the effort to communicate effectively with someone. Compassionate communication trainings are utilized in settings beyond romantic relationships and familial relationships and have been very useful in the workplace in bridging communication gaps. It’s difficult enough to try to figure out how to communicate compassionately with our partners and our families who we know we will have to deal with for the rest of our lives, so it’s a lot to ask of someone to put the effort in to exercise what is essentially compassionate communication with a coworker, no less a stranger on social media who they will likely never meet.

The people who we communicate with more compassionately are the people who we have deemed to be important in our lives (or sometimes the opposite). We better figure out how to communicate with them because we’re stuck with them for good and we just can’t live with the tension. The distance between people who are not in intimate relationships with one another is so vast. Where is the incentive to communicate compassionately with those who we do not deem as important to us, who we don’t see as family or as a part of our collective community?

Just as Peter Stalker said, “To ask about the rights of immigrants is to re-open many awkward questions” in the seemingly settled waters of our local food systems, exposing the many fault lines “of race, gender, social class, culture and religion,” (Stalker 2008). Who should we communicate compassionately and respectfully with? Who shouldn’t we? When is it time to

shut people out that hinder our cause and not waste the energy? What is the efficacy in isolating such people in the name of justice? If a bunch of liberal farmers and foodies can't get on the same page, how can we imagine bridging greater gaps in our structurally unjust world?



Chapter IV. Radicalization, Racialization, & Whiteness on Local Farms

Introduction

We've explored where radical and reflexive thought has been throughout our discourse in academia, in the Willamette Valley farm-to-table food scene, and in the media. But what about the discourse actually on our local small farms who hire migrant workers? Just as we learned in Margaret Gray's *Labor and the Locavore*, there is very little research on local small farms who hire migrant labor. Gray did interviews with migrant workers and the local farm owners they worked for across the Hudson Valley over a period of ten years. She was able to identify patterns among local small farms in the Hudson Valley regarding the challenges faced by both migrant workers and farm owners, one of which was a particular void of radical and reflexive discourse among small farm owners.

Although I do not have research from dozens of local organic farms around the Willamette Valley (we do really need that research), I have seven years of experience at Oregon Organics Farm, one of the most prominent local organic small farms in the Valley. The last two of the years I worked there were focused on researching, noticing, and navigating the radical fault lines on farm. My unique positionality working and connecting with Latinx women in the fields, engaging with management and US-born employees in difficult conversations about agency and voice, and acting as the face of the farm on social media and at the farmers market offered me many unique insights as well as blind spots. These are addressed more explicitly in my methods section.

Overall, many of the same patterns that Gray identified among farmworkers and farm owners in the Hudson Valley are also present at the farm that I work at, and I suspect on local organic farms throughout the Willamette Valley. Only at this specific farm, there are many other actors than just farm owners and migrant workers to take into consideration. The 2018 farming season was the first where management made a significant effort to make the historically Latinx field crew culturally integrated, resulting in field crews that had a nearly equal mixture of

Latinx migrant workers and US-born locavores. The experiences had by both the Latinx workers and the US-born workers serve as a major element of analysis in my exploration.

It's tricky business scoping out the radical fault lines and structural racism present on the farm that I personally work at, among the owners who are my bosses, among the US-born employees who are my friends, and within my own self. It's uncomfortable. But as I've said before, for those of us who have the privilege to tune in and out of that discomfort, especially those of us working on the farm with the Latinx men and women who have no such privilege, it's quite irresponsible not to once you know you can.

Although we must look at our local food systems with a more critical, reflexive eye, I have the utmost respect for the success that our local food systems have been able to achieve.

Addressing these critiques are simply the next steps for our local food systems to take. Just as Margaret Gray said in *Labor and the Locavore*, she isn't trying to write an exposé of our local small farms, she's aiming to provide a more in-depth context of our local food systems through understanding the typical experience of the farmworkers within it (Gray 2013, p143). Similarly, in *Agrarian Dreams* Julie Guthman wasn't trying to,

“discredit organic farms or scare away consumers. Rather, her goal was to challenge the myths and misconceptions about the organic agriculture industry itself,” (Gray 2013, p14).

Ethical consumers tend to have a knee-jerk reaction to stop supporting that which does not align with their values of complete sustainability. But navigating the radical fault lines of our local small farms is not meant to push consumers away from supporting problematic local systems. On the contrary, I aim to show locavores how deeply race- and class-based structural issues are embedded on even our favorite local small farms and in our alternative food systems at large, despite the best of intentions. Our local small farms are in need of our support and involvement now more than ever to address these issues head on. My work can serve as the jumping off point for further research, conversation, and collaboration.

The first section explores terminology used on farm and throughout this ethnography. The second introduces Oregon Organics Farm, contextualizes its position within the local food community in the Willamette Valley, and begins to explore the structures on farm that made working conditions prime for abuse despite the owners desiring otherwise. I tell the story that is found in every article written about the farm, and then contrast it with a brief lesser-known overview that contextualizes the pivotal 2018 season.

Next, we'll take a deep dive into just how complicated racial issues of voice and agency and whiteness can be even in a single meal at the farm. Farm lunch was the first place where I started becoming aware of race- and class-based inequalities and power dynamics which inspired me to get into the research and activism that I am engaged in now. Locavores new to understanding the complexities of power dynamics and whiteness can begin to understand just how complex things can be even in the context of a single meal. We join an Indigenous Oaxacan woman as she weaves through a farm-to-table kitchen full of white chefs prepping for service as she prepares a meal for the farm crew of both non-Latinx white locavores and Latinx migrant farmworkers. This is one of the few stories that I have written in a more academic and anthropological voice and follows the anthropological art of object implosion to get at the center of a complex thing.

The fourth section, Whiteness and Racialization in Local Food Spaces, takes a step back from Oregon Organics Farm to provide a broader analysis of the ways in which our local food spaces reproduce whiteness and racialization. Our local food spaces include our local small farms, farmers markets, farm-to-table restaurants, social media, and more. This section pulls heavily from Rachel Slocum's *Whiteness, Space and Alternative Food Practice*.

The fifth section offers up a different story of Oregon Organics Farm, a side that most people don't know. I was curious about the farm's history with hiring migrant labor, and this section pulls from my interviews with the farm owners to show how radical awareness has developed on farm over time, and how it is very much still in progress.

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Tumultuous Terminology

For many years while working at Oregon Organics Farm I never questioned the words that we used to refer to each other. Throughout the writing of my research I realized how problematic many normalized terms on the farm can be. I struggled to find language that felt both accurate and appropriate to describe the people that I was writing about. The terminology we use to identify others is changing rapidly as it is under particular scrutiny these days, and for very good reason. One day *food deserts* is a radical way to talk about race- and class-based inequalities in our food system, the next day *food apartheid* becomes the more appropriate term, as it was defined by those actually affected by it and not by the dominant population studying it (Brones 2018). Much of this transition has to do with a reversal of agency among those who have the power to create and reproduce terminology. People who studied food deserts named them. But people who actually suffer from a lack of food sovereignty chose a more accurate term that only their experience could inform.

The discourse on our local small farms, the terminology used, and the agency in who chooses what terminology is used to identify others are all extremely important to look at critically and with a radical eye. Marta Maria Maldonado explores “how Latino/as are racialized by employers.” She states,

“I analyse agricultural employers’ discourse as it reflects larger ideological forces that sustain and reproduce structural racism... by normalizing and de-problematizing racially unequal arrangements and making them invisible,” (Maldonado 2009).

In her paper, *‘It is their nature to do menial labour’: the racialization of ‘Latino/a workers’ by agricultural employers*, Maldonado studied the ways in which agricultural employers in Washington “espouse colour-blindness,” but “routinely invoke racial meanings in their assessment of workers and everyday practices,” (Maldonado 2009). At OOF, this tendency goes far beyond the farm owners and is shared among many of the white, US-born employees as well—me included. She continues,

“Both white and Latino/a employers use colour-blind discourse to ignore, erase and minimize structural racism and race and ethnicity as sociocultural factors.... [A]gricultural employers act as if race does not matter, creating an illusion of fairness and progressive politics, while reproducing the subordination of Latino/as, and safeguarding white privilege in workplaces... The use of the ‘soft’ language of cultural difference normalized and de-problematized the segmentation of jobs and racial hierarchies in workplaces,” (Maldonado 2009).

In order to talk about how issues of voice and agency exist and don’t exist on the farm, it’s important to understand the two predominant populations of employees at the farm who enjoy vastly different levels of voice and agency. If I were to refer to the two groups as Hispanic and American most locavores would understand generally what I was talking about. But there are many reasons why those terms are not accurate or appropriate for use. In fact, the entire notion of setting up such a dichotomy is so problematic. The social relations on farm are largely defined by a very real dichotomy, but that doesn’t mean that individuals are not intersectional in their identities or that there are monolithic experiences on either side of the dichotomy.

Employees and owners at the farm commonly refer to one group of people as “the crew”, “the field crew”, or “the guys”. The first two terms are problematic in that they imply that the people being referred to only work on the field crew, when a handful of them actually work in the packing shed. Regardless of where Latinx migrant employees work, when an extra person is needed on the back of the transplanter and the person in charge, often white and US-born, says they need an extra person from “the crew,” or that they need, “one of the guys,” which both essentially mean that they want a Latinx immigrant employee from either the field crew or the packing shed. The third term is additionally problematic in that it implies that the people being referred to are all male, when they are not. These terms that have been normalized at OOF are soft terms that serve to racialize Latinx employees, subconsciously or otherwise.

Geographical terminology is also problematic. “Latin American” or “Latino” don’t always apply as many of the members of this population identify more strongly as Indigenous than Latino, even for those with intersectional identities. The same is true of the term “Hispanic” as it refers to specifically to Spain-based communities. “Central American” doesn’t work since Mexico is

not a part of Central America. “Mexican” obviously doesn’t work since it doesn’t include the handful of Guatemalans. I find myself wanting to use the term “Oaxacan” to describe the Mexican workers for better accuracy, but I cannot because not every single person who is Mexican is also Oaxacan, though the vast majority is.

“Pan-ethnic labels such as Latino/a or Hispanic are problematic because they obscure vast differences in national origin, mode of incorporation, citizenship, race and class, for example. I use the label Latino/a, however, to highlight the shared dimensions of the experiences of these groups and their similar structural location,” (Maldonado 2009).

A decade later, scholars have settled on the term Latinx rather than Latino/a to be more inclusive of the gender spectrum and defy the gender binary. It seems the best word to use to refer to this group is Latinx, as it is the word that Latinx people self-identify as and is most inclusive of difference. However, I struggle in choosing to use it personally in this work, because none of the Latinx individuals at the farm identify as Latinx and few have ever heard the term.

When asked how they would describe each other, there was consensus that the preferred word was *Hispanos*, or, *migrantes*. However, many of them conversationally use the term *el grupo* to describe the crew, which may very well be the same racialized term defined by the owners, just translated into Spanish and normalized among the racialized themselves.

Regardless of which specific country the Latinx employees at OOF are from, everyone in this group did migrate to the states, so *migrantes*, or migrants, could be a perfectly accurate term. Internationally, migrants are described as living in a country that is not their birthplace of origin (Stalker 2008). We could refer to them as migrant farmworkers, however *migrant* farmworkers by definition migrate around various farms throughout the season. *Seasonal* farmworkers is the more accurate term to describe the group of employees on this farm, as they stay at the same farm throughout the entire season. So perhaps the most accurate and least problematic term to refer to this first group of people is Latinx seasonal farmworkers.

But even the use of the word “worker” in “farmworker” bothers me. Throughout my research I have noticed that US-born farmers do not use the words “workers” and “employees” to refer to people of equal status. At OOF and throughout the small farming community, without even noticing it, people refer to Latinx migrant farm labor as “workers” and reserve the word “employee” for their white, US-born labor force. This was apparent at the 2019 Small Farm Conference, where a white US-born farm owner spoke about the tight labor market making it hard for them to find workers for harvest, while in the same breath referring to the amazing team of people filling job roles in their food processing kitchens as employees. Because of this, I find myself wanting to limit the use of the word “worker” and refer to this first group of people at OOF as Latinx seasonal farm employees.

Although technically accurate, on the surface it seems to imply that the employees are temporary, seasonal workers, when this particular group of people at OOF are generally employed more year-round than most white US-born employees. Hours wane in the winter months and the farm owners prioritize keeping their core *crew* employed full time, with an understanding that their US-born employees can get another job through the winter easier or even live off their savings from the summer months. For the majority of this paper, I ended up omitting the qualifier and using the term, Latinx farmworker.

The second group consists of nearly everyone else who works at the farm who is not a Latinx seasonal farm employee, who can quite accurately be described as white. Of course, whiteness is a spectrum and not everyone that I’m referring to in this group is white, or all white. I could try to label them as “American” however this is problematic for a number of reasons. “American” refers to people in North and South America, despite how people in the United States tend to use the word to represent only people from the United States of America.

However, *los migrantes* at the farm describe this group as *los americanos*. On the women’s crew, white women are referred to as *chicas americanas*. This term was chosen with care, taking into account the general age difference between the younger white women and the older Latinx women. One day in the fields, the Latinx women asked the white US-born women what word they should use to describe them to be respectful, mostly of our age it seemed.

Señoras? Mujeres? Chicas? Muchachas? Together we tried to figure out what translated best into English to match how we identified ourselves. They had the courtesy to ask us what we prefer to be called despite not being asked themselves. I didn't even think to ask them what terms they'd prefer until this conversation took place, and immediately felt shame.

Obviously, everyone at Oregon Organics Farm exists on a spectrum of intersectional identities, and the very attempt to create two monolithic groups is problematic and will never accurately describe everyone. In general, the second group consists of non-Latinx white US-born employees, often college-educated locavores, while the first consists of Latinx immigrant employees or farmworkers. I use a combination of the terminology we just explored throughout this paper in different situations where they seem appropriate.

“The evidence discussed here suggests that the racial division of labour and the hierarchies that exist in agricultural workplaces are not accidental, but produced from day to day by employers through the mobilization of racial ideologies and through practices enabled and sustained by such ideologies.

Racial meanings influence employers’ perceptions and assessments of workers, and employer practices serve as the mechanism through which racist ideologies become institutionalized and invisible.”

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Welcome to Oregon Organics Farm

Oregon Organics Farm (OOF), located just outside of Corvallis, Oregon, is one of the leading organic local small farms in the Willamette Valley area. More specifically, it is one of the top three biggest, most popular, and longest-standing produce vendors at the Portland State farmers market, which is often rated among the top farmers markets in the country (see appendix). It sells produce at nine farmers markets, has a 300-member CSA, and sells wholesale

to New Seasons and hundreds of high-end restaurants and grocery stores in both Portland and Corvallis. Its own farmstand and restaurant are a favorite destination among locals and tourists, and the local agriculture university partners with the farm for research purposes and tours its students through the farm to show them an example of what organic farming can be.

The farm and its owners, husband and wife duo Jim and Nancy, have been featured in countless articles for their innovative and diversified farming structure. Though they started out as a small group of friends farming and eating meals together around Jim's grandfather's old oak dining table in their home, thirty years later payroll hit a record 147 employees and "farm lunch" now includes breakfast every morning and lunch three times a week for up to 70 on-farm employees in the heat of the season.

OOF has a harvest party at the end of every season, and everyone lets loose and dances to the bouncy beat of Alegria Musical, the mariachi band that some of the farm's Latinx employees have formed, sequin outfits and all. For those of us who work on the farm, we don't have much time for anything but working. The farm encompasses our lives and for many creates a sense of family. That beauty is real, and it's the story that everyone who has heard about the farm knows.

But just as novelist Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's stories show how the danger of a single story lies in the creation of cultural misconceptions, single stories are never the whole story (Adichie 2009). The single story of local food has been perpetuated by nearly every prominent food writer, telling the beautiful tale that is the joys of local and alternative food movements. That single story is true, as there is much success to our local food systems and much to be celebrated. But this single story has entirely omitted the migrant workers who have subsidized the growth of our local organic small farms with their labor. Their existence, voices, and perspectives are largely unknown to the locavore who only knows one story of local food. As Margaret Gray says,

"Charmed and persuaded by the aesthetics of agrarianism, food writers sustain the belief that local agricultural activity is superior in almost every respect to the industrial food system..."

Consumers cannot be faulted for this; they are simply mimicking the attitudes of food movement leaders like Michael Pollan, who argues that there are two essential categories of farming: industrial and pastoral... But where does farm labor fit into this division of good and evil?" (Gray 2013, p41)

All around the world the historically silenced voices of the marginalized are spreading awareness of the race- and class-based inequalities that are embedded within us all, and within the charming local food systems that we locavores adore. In these changing times, how are our local small farms adapting to an increased awareness of structural racism and power dynamics? How is the migrant worker experience on local small farms compared to on industrial farms? This chapter allows us to explore the ways in which racism and whiteness become reproduced, hindering worker voice and agency despite the best of intentions, even on a local organic small farm. The process of radicalization on our local small farms is itself actively redefining the goals of "progress" in our local food communities that have long identified as progressive.

Locavores do not know this story. We know the story of our local farms and communities through our perspectives, and without really thinking about it, we tend to assume that our favorite booths at the farmers market do not hire migrant labor at all, or that if they did, there wouldn't be unjust working conditions. Even for those of us who work on these farms and are somewhat aware of the role of migrant labor within our local food systems, most of us don't think twice that we are a part of the problem. For most, the plight of the migrant worker is a big political issue that has nothing to do with our identities as locavores.

There's a false narrative that inequity for migrant workers is perpetuated only through the political structures that embed racism into our immigration policies and institutions, but that certainly working on small organic farms for "good" people wouldn't be embedded with any of those same structural problems. Surely locavores are "good" people, right? Structural racism is too complicated to apply to a spectrum as narrow as good and bad. As Ivan Illich warned of the dangers of paternalism in any form of service for those in need, "you will not help anyone with your good intentions.... I am here to challenge you to recognize your inability, your powerlessness and your incapacity to do the 'good' which you intended to do," (Illich 1968).

Illich is getting at the fact that the dominant population does not often recognize when it is inappropriate to come up with solutions to other groups' problems. Sovereignty includes the right for people to have their own agency to think up solutions, employ them, and ask for help from others in achieving their goals. I do however believe that we are all collectively able, powerful, and capable of making structural changes that would promote collective sovereignty. But it absolutely matters who is calling the shots and who is not along the way.

Locavores of the dominant local food community identify themselves as ethical consumers and pride themselves on their ethical decisions that they define with their values. Even beyond food, we've all felt a little better about ourselves when we bought a pair of Toms shoes knowing that "someone in need" would get a pair too. The documentary *Poverty Inc.* describes how such "charitable" actions actually undermine local communities in rebuilding their own economies (Miller 2016). As we explored in *Labor and the Locavore*, despite actions made by farm owners that may be inspired by generosity, no one can not escape the historical paradigms that bind us and blind us to the reality that structural racism is inside us all and all of our institutions, and that our beloved local farms are no exception. So how are our local small farms structured in ways that reproduce racism and whiteness?

OOF, like nearly all the other major organic farms at local farmers markets, employs a largely segregated Latinx field crew that is primarily responsible for harvest, whereas other job positions tend to be filled by US-born employees. This crew thus often works separately from US-born workers, and due to language barriers and social barriers far more complex, there has not been much communication between Latinx migrant employees and white US-born employees. At OOF, even though we all eat meals together, engage in pleasant small talk, have harvest parties together, work together on certain tasks, and enjoy a wide variety of unique employee benefits, for a long time the Latinx crew's foreman was essentially the only funnel through which the owners communicated with the migrant workers below him, as has been standard procedure on most local organic farms that employ migrant workers.

Yet there are red flags all over the place. You take the most vulnerable population of people in the country and then give one man all of the power to control hiring, firing, time cards, time off,

job tasks, and all communications with the owners. Red flag! How could anyone not see that? But the reality is, the owners didn't see it, and neither did the majority of white, US-born employees. For a long time. Although unintentionally, conditions were prime for abuse among the migrant population, as is true of most farms that hire migrant labor.

It took the pushing of a few key employees—primarily the Latinx advocate on farm and her wife, the farm manager—to get management to see that things needed to change. They noticed things that the owners didn't, and workers came to them voicing concerns and not to the owners. From the perspective of these two powerful change-making women, getting management to take action felt like a fight every day for years. Eventually, it became clear to management that conditions on their farm were in fact prime for abuse, which finally led to their firing of the foreman at the end of 2017 and a new dedication to radical change on farm.

The 2018 season after the foreman's firing was the first year that radical thought and change began significantly infiltrating the historically progressive space, the first year that structural changes began to be employed to address race- and class-based inequalities and that the agency of migrant workers was shifted to top priority. In an attempt to promote better workplace conditions for migrant workers, the structure of the field crew was reorganized, as were daily operations. Those decisions were made including various levels of worker voice in the change-making process. Of course, major issues have not been fully resolved and attempts to promote agency have been problematic but addressing issues of agency is newly out in the open and in the process of being addressed.

Two of the major changes that have been made to the field crew created highly unique workplace environments, for better and for worse. First, the crew has been divided into a men's crew and a women's crew, which is obviously problematic, and also has many complicated facets. After the foreman's firing, it was unclear to the owners whether or not he was the only problem or the extent to which there was a culture of inappropriate behavior among other members of the crew.

One day, it came to the owners' attention that the new manager of the men's crew, the former foreman's brother, was behaving inappropriately around women in the workplace. The women themselves didn't vocalize this, on the contrary, when interviewed with a translator they vocalized that nothing was happening that management needed to be concerned; it was the foreman's (now ex-) wife who brought his behavior to the owners' attention.

The owners said that if he didn't know how to behave appropriately even after all of the new sexual harassment trainings they employed, or if they weren't sure he would behave appropriately, then they would simply not allow him to manage or be around women anymore, which is precisely what they did with the foreman before the year before they fired him. When I later asked the owners how they would describe why they segregated the crews by gender, they said, "it just relieves pressure for everyone," that the men had vocalized that it was easier to avoid being around women than it was to learn how to behave appropriately around them, and that the women liked working together better anyway. The segregation wasn't strict. Crews worked together on larger tasks, but nonetheless it was a powerful defining element of the season, and a heavily problematic one to say the least.

Although that sounds like the most ridiculous decision to make in 2018 at a time when gender norms are being questioned by all those who have been oppressed by them, it's not necessarily an uncommon practice on our local small farms. Gender segregation can come in the form of hiring discrimination as well. In an email from a past employee of both OOF and Farm B, another major local farm in the area, the employee recalled that "Farm B did not hire any women or non-Hispanic men to work on their farm for a solid 10-15 years."

Despite the newly gender-segregated crew, the crew also became heavily culturally integrated for the first time in recent OOF history, with a near-equal balance of Latinx migrant workers and US-born locavores working together in the fields every day. Or rather, a group of Latinx men and US-born men working together and a group of Latinx women and US-born women. The social dynamics being navigated in a newly culturally-integrated and gender-segregated environment were incredibly unique and can help lead to understanding more about the process of rocky radicalization as it plays out quite literally on the ground.

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Farm Lunch—An Ethnographic Implosion of a Single Meal

I wanted to take a deep dive into just how complicated racial issues of voice and agency and whiteness can be even in one small facet of life on the farm. I find that when I am talking about these issues with locavores who are new to these concepts, talking about how power dynamics and issues of voice and agency play out in the farm lunch setting works well as an introduction.

This story is one of the few stories that I have written in a more academic and anthropological voice and follows the anthropologist Joseph Dumit’s art of object implosion to get at the center of a complex thing (Dumit 2014). Dumit defines implosion projects as “attempts to teach and learn about the embeddedness of objects, facts, actions, and people in the world and the world in them. The emphasis is on details and nonobvious connections,” (Dumit 2014). The object being imploded in this chapter is a single meal made by a specific person at a specific place for specific people, on February 26th, 2018.

This story implodes a single farm lunch meal, with farm lunch as the site where awareness of power disparities and racial inequity first caught my eye. After realizing how complicated something as simple as a meal could be, I expanded my awareness and started looking for how race- and class-based inequalities were affecting my Latinx coworkers’ voice and agency in other areas of the farm, and how my fellow US-born locavores and I were reproducing those inequalities rather inadvertently. These issues present much farther-reaching consequences for the lives of individual workers in many more spaces than just farm lunch.

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On Monday, February 26th, 2018 Berta arrives at work before the sun at Oregon Organics Farm just as she has six days a week for years. Rather than pulling on rubber boots and rain gear and

loading up onto flat beds with the rest of the dominantly Oaxacan field crew on this damp winter morning, she walks through the packing shed, steps into the compact farm kitchen, and puts a wide pot of black beans on the last open burner on the stove. It is the first week that the artisanal restaurant is open and there are six US-born chefs bustling about in the kitchen. One of them can speak a few words of Spanish, just slightly less than Berta can speak English.

Nonetheless, she begins preparing food in the kitchen that must feed forty employees, some of whom are Mexican, some of whom are Guatemalan, and the majority of whom are US-born—but all of whom must be satisfied by the meal that she is about to prepare. She takes six of the farm-raised chickens out of the restaurant's walk-in freezer, waits quietly for the sink to become available as a tall chef washes his hands, and then slips in and places them in a small tote of water in the sink to defrost. With lunch in motion, she begins prep for breakfast.

This meal exists as the embodiment of the forces which worked to create it, ranging from the ingredients themselves, to Eva's journey to the farm and into the kitchen as well as her experience there, to the values which allow Oregon Organics Farm to even offer farm lunch, to the overlapping and conflicting desires of the culturally diverse group who would eat it. In this way this meal serves as a point of departure for discussion of the individual values which exist at this small-scale organic produce farm in the Willamette Valley in 2018. How are the dominant cultures at OOF separate and how are they together? What is it that this meal is doing? What is it that this meal could do?

OOF offers their employees a home-cooked meal three days a week, and breakfast six days a week, collectively referred to as "farm lunch." To the best of my knowledge there are no other farms of comparable scale that offer this to their employees unless room and board are also offered as a part of a work stay, which is not something that OOF offers. Oddly enough, the only occupations which come close to offering the types of dietary benefits that OOF offers are large Tech corporations such as Google, Airbnb, and Facebook. They offer many food benefits, including not just meals but snacks as well. Corporate benefit packages are increasingly offering food benefits in an effort to attract and maintain talent in their employee base, and much effort is made on the part of food ethnographers such as June Jo Lee under the funding of The

Hartman Group to figure out exactly what employees are wanting in terms of food benefits these days. Companies pay a hefty price to make sure that they offer the types of food that their target employees want (Lee 2014).

When I asked owner Jim how it is that farm lunch came to be something that OOF prioritized, he reflected back on growing up on a corn farm in Iowa. Like any subsistence community, the town that Jim grew up in consisted of many farmers. Come harvest time, families in the area would migrate from house to house, helping to achieve large tasks together and more efficiently. Whoever's home you were at would provide a home-cooked meal for everyone who was working, and this is something that Jim valued highly and carried with him.

At first, the OOF crew consisted of a handful of people, most of whom had worked as chefs at a local restaurant that Jim and some friends and family started, so it was easy for one person to stop working and fix everyone some Gonzo cuisine. As the farm grew larger, Jim became the regular farm lunch chef, cooking food in his kitchen and serving it on his grandfather's oak table in his home. But soon after OOF's restaurant was constructed and up and running, farm lunch became a task handled by someone who worked in the kitchen and was served to employees in new seating areas within the packing shed that the restaurant is attached to. Now there are so many employees and visitors eating farm lunch each day that people dine in three separate areas and the task of making farm lunch is now split between multiple employees throughout the week.

Snack used to be nothing more than coffee and a pastry, but in recent years it has transformed into a full-blown breakfast meal after many requests for more savory and filling food. In employee orientation packets, coffee, snack, and lunch are valued as an extra \$50 per week, which works out to be \$1.25 per hour divided across a 40-hour week, although many employees work closer to 60 and beyond. Beyond the financial value, employees highly value the convenience of being provided a hot meal twice a day. And even beyond the convenience, many US-born employees regularly express how much they value the familial vibe of farm lunch, how sharing meals promotes intimacy. But familial intimacy for whom?

Embodiment—The Meal

A typical implosion-object project turns our attention toward how the world is in the objects that we care about and how they, in turn, become part of the world. The hope is to situate food within the human interactions which worked to create it. In *Sweetness and Power: The Place of Sugar in Modern History* by Sidney Mintz details a historical sequence of events which led to the situation where we find sugar in our daily lives (Mintz 1986). Similarly, this paper views the object of implosion—the meal—as physical embodiment of the forces which acted to create it, largely human forces in the form of varying schools of thought, ethics, and emotion. The following is therefore a simpler list of the ingredients which physically made up the meal and where they came from but is intentionally not an implosion of those individual ingredients.

On this particular day, breakfast, referred to by everyone at OOF as “snack”, consisted of scrambled eggs, bacon, OOF salsa, a prepared green salsa, Juanita’s tortilla chips, beet brownies, store-bought croissants, and microwaved store-bought flour tortillas. The latter two ingredients were purchased at the grocery store. The beet brownies were made with red beets grown at the farm and were made by the farm’s US-born pastry chef. The eggs were purchased from Cocks and Comb, a local small-scale farm. Coffee, bagged tea, and Tropicana orange juice were also offered. The coffee comes from a local roaster who largely barter with OOF for vegetables, and both the tea and the juice are purchased at the grocery store. I eat everything, and I feel nourished.

Snack is served at 10:00am every day at OOF. Around 9:50 am Berta told me that she was worried that she didn’t make enough eggs. She knew that everyone used to complain that Clarissa, the chef who she replaced, made too much food and ended up wasting a lot. But she also did not want to run out of food. But she didn’t know how many people she needed to feed. No one told her and she didn’t ask. She ended up scrambling up another dozen eggs as the first wave began filing in for lunch. After piling the extra eggs into the pan with the rest, she grabbed a stack of tortillas out of the microwave about fifty tortillas tall and placed them in a cave of tin

foil to keep them warm. She lifted up the top tortilla and it gave way in her fingers like wet fabric before she flopped it back down with disappointment on her face. She lamented that she had prepared masa in order to make fresh tortillas like she does at home but that she couldn't find it. I asked her if she asked anyone in the kitchen if they had moved it and she said no, which could speak to the discomfort that she feels working in a space that doesn't feel welcoming.

Lunch is served from 1:00-1:30pm every Monday, Wednesday, and Friday. Berta prepared white rice seasoned with *consomme* (bouillon) and salt and baked in a metal pan; black beans cooked with onion and salt; farm-raised chicken that she cut into pieces seasoned with dried chile, salt, and olive oil and roasted until golden brown; and OOF salad mix served with both prepared and house-made dressings from the restaurant. The organic black beans were ordered in bulk by the restaurant from GloryBee distributors, and the rice was purchased in bulk through Sysco distribution.

To prepare the chicken for lunch, Berta quietly waited for the kitchen crew to move away from the sink that she wanted to cut it up in. Berta's behavior in the kitchen seemed much more timid than how I've seen her act in the field, where she is laughing and joking and moving her body freely. In the kitchen, it looked as if she were trying to take up as little space as possible with her body in order to avoid being in the way of the chefs. I do not mean to imply that this is a specifically or wholly racial issue. That is, I do not mean to say that Berta felt uncomfortable in the kitchen specifically or wholly as a result of being the only Spanish-speaker. I have felt timid during times when I've had to work on food processing in that kitchen when the chefs around me are trying to do service, have tried to make my body as small as possible, and have even avoided asking questions to chefs whose minds are busy on time-sensitive tasks. There are many factors at play, but for Berta, the level of discomfort is elevated.

She had six chickens to cut up, and as she was working her way through the third one, one of the restaurant chefs leaned over and asked me (not Berta) when she would be done using the sink. I told him that she had three more chickens left and that she would be done soon. I turned back to Berta and she asked me what he had said. I translated our exchange and told her that I

thought he wanted to use the sink when she was done, and that I told him she'd be done after cutting the last three chickens. Berta started cutting away at the chickens faster and faster, separating leg from breast, etc. She said that her knife was dull and it was making it go more slowly. I could see that she felt stressed to finish the job quickly and I knew that she would likely not ask someone in the kitchen for a better tool, and so amidst the haste I tried to help.

I grabbed a large chef's knife from the magnetic knife board and offered it to her. She tried it out but said it was too big. So, I turned and asked one of the chefs what knife would be good for the task she was doing, and he gave me a small paring knife and said to sharpen it first, so I did. I gave her the knife, but it still wasn't powerful enough, so she switched back to using the original dull knife that she started with. I wanted to give Berta a more powerful tool through the ease of access which I possess, and she does not in an effort to make her job easier, but to no avail. Despite multiple attempts, my intervention did not help her, and she went back to the dull tool that she started with that at the very least got the job done.

Berta said that she was worried that it was going to be too much chicken and that she shouldn't have defrosted so much. After she finished cutting the chicken and clearing the area, Berta went to check on the black beans on the stove. As she stirred the beans and tasted a quick finger dip to test the salt levels, she told me that she had no idea what was in the pots on the stove next to hers. She looked around the kitchen and gestured around with her hand, saying that she didn't know what any of them were working on, implying that it was ridiculous to be in such close quarters with other people and not communicate with them at all. I asked the chefs what they were working on and then translated it to Berta. As she stirred her pot she said, "*Oh, qué rico!*" Essentially, "That sounds good!"

• • •

Berta

Berta was born and raised in Oaxaca, Mexico. Her first language is Mixtec alto, though she is also fluent in Spanish. When she was a child, Berta told me as she salted the beans, there was not yet electricity in the small town that she lived in. Men would generally go to work farming

beans and corn in surrounding fields and women would set to work grinding masa, making tortillas, and otherwise preparing food for the day. She misses the quality of masa and beans that she used to cook with and is dissatisfied with the available ingredients in the United States, though I can see that this doesn't stop her from making the best of what she has. She still makes tortillas by hand every day at home with Maseca, only she has to make them at night since there isn't enough time to do it in the morning before work.

The picture that Berta painted of her life in relation to food back in Oaxaca was reflected in Roberto González's *Zapotec Science: Farming and Food in the Northern Sierra of Oaxaca*. This book asks its readers to question the strict, Western definition of science as something that must be measured with precise instruments and an emphasis on the quantitative rather than the qualitative. Instead, González invited his readers to widen their definition of science to include more qualitative ways of knowing, going back to the original meaning of the word science which was intended simply to mean "knowledge" (González 2001).

Berta, along with the rest of the Mexican and Guatemalan field crew, possesses an immense amount of scientific knowledge regarding farming and foodways their respective countries. Her creation of this meal would not be possible without the knowledge that she possesses of the science of Oaxacan meal making. Likewise, the work that the members of the field crew do for Oregon Organics Farm would not be possible without the knowledge that they possess of the science of Oaxacan and Guatemalan farming and foodways.

Berta has only been cooking crew lunch on Mondays since the start of 2018, so for just about two months at the time of the meal being imploded today, preparing variations on the foods that she learned how to cook from her mother in Oaxaca. Every week this means that on Mondays there are beans, rice, tortillas, and chicken, prepared with some variation. She has high standards for the job that she does, attempting to make sure that there is enough food without having excess and that the food will satisfy everyone in some way. She may have made a typical Oaxacan meal, but she made alterations in order to satisfy her American audience by excluding spicy chiles and baking crispy chicken instead of making soup.

She worked at OOF from 2006 to 2008 and then spent some time back in Oaxaca for a few years, where she was once again unable to make money or get food for her family, so she returned to OOF in 2015 and continues to work there. After OOF's winter break at the end of 2017, farm owner Nancy asked Berta if she would make crew lunch on Mondays during the winter and Berta said yes. She had made lunch on occasion for just the field crew on Saturdays back in 2008, so Nancy thought she would be a good fit. Also, there are limited hours available on the farm in the winter and giving Berta work in the kitchen meant there could be work out in the field for someone else, and Jim and Nancy could keep more of the field crew (more Latin American migrants) employed throughout the winter.

Crew Lunch in 2017

Employee logistics were not the only reason that Jim and Nancy wanted Berta to cook lunch. In the six years that I have been at OOF, crew lunch has been a consistently contentious issue. Anyone who cooks farm lunch knows that everyone will be talking at the table about what they like and don't like about the meal, and that the criticisms can get pretty harsh and direct at times. These tensions culminated in 2017 and revealed themselves in a variety of ways, with one of the results being Berta's new position in the kitchen.

In 2017 there were three farm chefs: Michelle on Mondays, Susan on Wednesdays, and Miranda on Fridays. Miranda is a white US-born female in her late twenties. She eats a vegan diet and cooked predominantly vegan dishes for crew lunch, though there was generally always a meat entrée present. Her meals were particularly dependent on a diverse, plant-dominant ingredient base, and she paid particular attention to incorporating vegetables from the farm and limiting her use of refined sugars and grains. Overall, her food was enjoyed by everyone, although white US-born employees were particularly enthralled with the meals, whereas Latinx employees complained of the food not tasting good and that it was often not sufficiently filling due to the limited presence of meat, wheat, and corn.

Susan has been cooking crew lunch on Wednesdays for OOF for over a decade. She is a middle-aged white US-born woman who eats a vegetarian diet and utilizes the Moosewood cookbook

religiously for vegetarian recipes that emphasize “simply, healthy, and seasonal food” (Katzen 1974), although she always cooks with meat for crew lunch. She has spent many years working for a large-scale catering company in Corvallis and continues to do so. Susan is kind of the grandmother of Oregon Organics Farm, and because of this she is safe from much criticism. Her meals are generally very dense with refined flours and sugars, cheese, and meat, and unlike Miranda she is not afraid to thicken up a sauce with corn syrup and serve a half dozen different pastries with breakfast. But everyone loves Susan. If a complaint is ever made, it is done quietly between US-born coworkers about how they love Susan and the comfort food that she makes, but that the food that she makes is so dense and lacking in vegetables (odd for her vegetarian ways) that they feel too heavy to go back to work afterward. But this is probably not something that anyone will ever have the heart to tell her.

Such consideration was not taken for 2017’s least popular crew lunch chef, Michelle, who was more intertwined with OOF staff than any other person. Michelle is a white US-born woman in her mid-forties, and her diet consists of mostly pre-packaged processed food, but with a twist of traditional Oaxacan cooking due to marrying into a Oaxacan family who dominates the Latinx field crew. Throughout 2017, both non-Latinx and Latinx employees were expressing dissatisfaction with the meals that Michelle was making on a very regular basis, as she was also preparing breakfast on Tuesdays and Thursdays. Sometimes she would serve more packaged products and hardly any vegetables. Sometimes she would make more typical Oaxacan foods, only it was rare that the beans or rice were anything but crunchy.

Throughout the season, white US-born employees tended to voice their values openly, whether in approval of the food or in criticism. In general, they valued the increased usage of vegetables from the farm, the use of alternative grains, and minimal use of animal products. Conversely, they tended to not value processed foods, heavy foods such as cheese and pasta, and repetitive meals in general.

Latinx employees did not vocalize their food values openly but spoke at length when I asked. Some people wanted more savory foods for breakfast whereas others loved it when pastries dominated. Meat was a top priority across the board, and there was a shared sentiment that

heavy foods such as mac and cheese were not conducive to manual labor in hot greenhouses despite being tasty. No one likes beans or rice or potatoes that aren't cooked through, regardless of which ethnic group they fell into. But Latinx employees consistently tend to bring their own food that they prefer in such a situation, whereas non-Latinx US-born employees are incredibly vocal about the diminishing meal quality.

The tensions that existed around the overlapping and conflicting desires and values held by both groups in 2017 became embodied in a variety of ways. In the middle of the summer I began noticing that less and less of the field crew were showing up for lunch. This struck me as particularly odd. None of us at the farm make much money, and it's incredibly cost effective to eat the free lunch that is provided to us, so the fact that they were choosing to not accept this benefit showed how dissatisfied they were by the meals. After talking with Berta, I learned that there was a woman on the field crew who had been making tamales at home and bringing them to work to sell to the other members of the field crew. Another day I noticed a long extension cord going from the shop to a storage shed. I followed the cord and found that Serapio, the oldest member of the field crew, had a microwave and small dining area set up for himself in the shed. I noticed over the next few weeks that he had stopped coming to lunch entirely and was instead choosing to eat alone and reheat either Top Ramen or Oaxacan leftovers that his girlfriend had packed him.

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Crew lunch at Oregon Organics Farm has changed many times over the years, taking new shapes and forms. When the crew was small enough to fit around a single table, the groups were physically together in a much more intimate way, although the language barriers between Americans and Oaxacans and Guatemalans maintained a rather impermeable cultural membrane. As the crew grew larger and seating expanded to nearly ten different tables scattered around the packing shed in three areas about fifty feet from each other, a physical segregation of people by race could be seen. White, US-born employees always sat in the main area of the packing shed that's out in the open, and Latinx employees sat either in their recreation room inside the mechanic's shop, or behind the restaurant where there are extra

tables and chairs. The visual of white bodies sitting out in the open for all passerby to see versus brown bodies sitting in visibly dark, hidden corners of the packing shed was concerning to say the least.

What was even more concerning was the fact that not only had I never really noticed it before, but that no one else seemed to either. The majority of Americans who choose to work at OOF want to be there specifically for ethical reasons. They care about where their food comes from, how it's produced, immigrant rights, their quality of life, etc., and all of this is generally prioritized over money, as nearly everyone could easily work a different job and make more. With such seemingly consciously-minded people all working amidst this situation, it seems surprising that a clear racial segregation would be going unnoticed. It begs the question, what else is everyone failing to notice? Thus far there has been discussion surrounding two dominant groups at Oregon Organics Farm, but this implies that everyone in each cultural group is on the same page when this is not actually the case. Just as the American crew is divided into smaller groups of people who generally all sit together, the field crew is divided into even stricter groups who often avoid sitting with each other. This is known through careful observation and conversations with members of the field crew, two methods of knowing which for some reason go rather unused by the majority of American employees.

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Two weeks after I interviewed Berta, a series of events unfolded that were cause for concern. My roommate, who is the sous chef at OOF's restaurant, Jack, told me on Friday that he was asked by the head chef to make crew lunch on Monday. I asked him if he knew why Berta wasn't cooking, and he said he didn't know, but that he thought it would be a one-time thing. She had told me that she had been missing work for doctor's appointments, so I thought that maybe she just needed to be gone that day. Over the weekend, Jack set to work brainstorming the meal he would make on Monday, and his thinking was highly influenced by my writing of this paper.

Jack hears me talk through all of these issues on a regular basis, and just like everyone else who makes farm lunch, he felt the pressure of the challenge to please everyone. All he knew is that he was supposed to use some ground beef that the farm had just got a good deal of. Jack, a six-foot tall blonde from Pennsylvania, spent his Saturday and Sunday studying up on how to make Mexican foods—the best way to make rice, beans, tortillas, and ways to cook ground beef with smoked chilis. He spent hours and hours watching home-videos on YouTube of Mexican women cooking traditional dishes in their kitchens and taking notes, and over the course of 48 hours he changed his mind on what exactly he was going to make approximately a hundred times. Pinto beans or black beans? Or adzuki beans? White rice or brown? Spicy meat or mild? Tortillas or sopas? After much deliberation, he settled on his menu. The only thing that he was unsure about was the making of the tortillas, which he hadn't done before and is an art. I have a side obsession with masa and tortillas and had been practicing making them almost every day for the past few months, so I came early to help make the tortillas. His effort warmed my heart.

On Monday I arrived at the farm with half an hour to spare until lunch was to be served. Jack had me taste the slaw, beans, rice, and stewed meat and I thought that everything was delicious. As he worked on setting up for lunch, I got to work making tortillas on the flat top grill. He began expressing the same concerns that I had heard Berta voice two weeks before, saying for example that he didn't know how many people were going to be there, or if there were any vegetarians that he was supposed to provide alternative options for. At one point we were both bustling about trying to get everything done before 1:00 and Jack said, "Well, they're either going to love me or hate me, and I don't really care either way." I read that meaning that he did really care and was feeling a bit nervous about how people were going to react to his food. The early birds started trickling in and dishing up as Jack was still running around grabbing stacks of plates and the like. All the while, I kept making tortillas.

A few minutes past 1:00 the field crew filed into the kitchen through the back door. Anyone who enters the kitchen generally takes the back route through the kitchen so as to avoid being in the way of whoever is cooking, whether it be a farm lunch chef or the restaurant crew, but the field crew most definitely always takes the back route over to where people dish up. But on

this particular day, the entire field crew came around the prep island in the kitchen and surrounded me as I was making tortillas. Before I knew it, there were four Latinx women all flipping my tortillas and giving me pointers on what I could do better. They were very surprised that I was making fresh tortillas, and they all laughed when I told them that I was struggling getting them to inflate with air. One of the women, gave me a few pieces of advice that made all the difference, and now every tortilla I make inflates as it should. Everyone on the field crew knew that the fresher tortillas straight off the *comal* (grill) were the best and lined up to get them as they were ready.

Almost everyone had dished up and were seated by the time I finished turning all the masa into tortillas, and I dished myself up a plate of food and sat down on the deck. In the winters when the restaurant is closed and it's too cold to eat outside crew lunch is served on the deck of the restaurant. The closest, biggest table was full of white US-born employees, and all the Latinx employees were sitting at a few smaller tables on the opposite side of the room. The sun was shining and multiple members of the field crew were expressing in Spanish how much they were enjoying their meal.

By 1:30 everyone was piling back into flat beds and heading back to work. I went into the kitchen to help Jack clean up. I thought that the meal prioritized the needs and desires of the often-unrecognized Latinx group very well, and I had a huge smile on my face from the feeling of making tortillas with all of the women. Never had I seen the field crew feel so comfortable in the same space which they normally walk deliberately around so as not to be in the way. Never had I seen them be so interested or involved in the process of cooking crew lunch, reaching in with their own hands to help make food. From my perspective, that was my favorite crew lunch experience that I'd had at OOF in the six years I'd been working there. I told Jack that I thought it went really well. He, on the other hand, was not so sure.

Jack had sat at the larger table of Americans and wasn't told by a single person that they enjoyed the meal. One person told him that they thought the meat was too spicy. The owner told Jack he should have made more vegetables and left it at that. Jack's energy was low. He lamented that earlier that morning Berta actually had come into the kitchen thinking that she

was making farm lunch that day. It seemed that no one had communicated to her that Jack was cooking, and he felt badly about it. After a conversation in the kitchen doorway in broken Spanglish, she got the idea and went to work on the field crew for the rest of the day. What had been such a successful experience of cultural immersion between me and the rest of the field crew was not as successful for all those involved. What happened? Who made the decision that Berta was not going to cook Monday? Why did they make that decision? And most importantly why was it that this message did not make it to Berta of all people?

[Back to the Field](#)

Apparently, the owners didn't think it would be best for Berta to be cooking crew lunch anymore. Jim said that Berta had said that she felt intimidated by cooking for a larger number of people once the farming season got going, and that he was concerned that she wouldn't be capable of making anything other than rice, beans, tortillas, and chicken, and that "beans and chicken can only go so far." Nancy said that she was worried that now with the restaurant open it was probably really difficult for Berta to work in the kitchen with people who don't speak the same language and who she doesn't know, and that fieldwork was picking up anyway, so they could use an extra set of experienced hands on the field crew. Neither Jim nor Nancy know Spanish. So how is it that Jim knows that Berta felt intimidated? How is it that Nancy knows that she would rather be in the field than in the kitchen? Who said exactly what to whom?

Whenever the owners need to communicate with someone who doesn't speak English they generally get a partially-to-fluently bilingual employee to translate for them, which is common practice on a lot of small farms. In this situation, Nancy had a Oaxacan woman who manages the packing shed to let Berta know in Spanish that she would be back in the field from now on and would no longer be cooking lunch. Berta said a quick, "Ok," and that was the end of the interaction. Later, I found out where the communication breakdown took place. Nancy told Genesis, a Venezuelan-born American citizen who serves as a Latinx advocate on the farm, that she actually hadn't found anyone to replace Berta on Monday farm lunch yet, so that really she was just thinking of phasing her out soon, but that she already got Jack to do this Monday, so maybe she would cook the following Monday. Genesis told this to Berta in Spanish, and

through a rather droll human miscommunication Berta simply did not understand whether she was working that Monday or not. Regardless, she had little to no agency in the situation, which would very likely have not been the case if she were an English-speaking employee.

Again, there is much that we do not know. Berta is still back in the field. 2018 lunch chefs were all white US-born employees, including myself. Similar tensions from 2017 continued on throughout the following season with little respite. Throughout the summer of 2018 working in the fields with my Latinx coworkers, I watched as my US-born coworkers adored vegetarian Thursdays, whereas many of my Latinx coworkers would toss the contents of their plates straight onto the ground in disgust. Riding around in the crew truck, everyone had their own snacks stashed away. Berta often insisted upon sharing her breakfast burritos with me from home, telling me that the food being served to us was not of good quality.

As I became closer with the Latinx women I worked with, I stopped sitting at the main table of white US-born employees that I had sat at for years and started going back to the crew shed to dine with them. Although I always had a plate of farm lunch, my Latinx coworkers would insist that I eat some of the food that they brought, as it was much better for working. I ate purslane and tomatillo soup with chicken, fresh tortillas, pozole, and so much more.

I made farm lunch a couple of times in 2018 in the heat of the season and worked myself up into a proper tizzy trying to balance the needs and desires of all of my coworkers. As unrealistic as it was, I made fresh tortillas by hand for over seventy people in addition to highly diversified meals. It was a logistical nightmare, and I used a lot of the farm's time and money to do it. But everyone loved it so much, it was worth it! I loved being able to share food that I made with those who had shared their food with me, and for weeks beforehand I was asking advice from the Latinx women in the field on how to make certain foods and what kinds of foods they thought we should have.

In 2018, I also started letting management know what kinds of foods many of my Latinx coworkers didn't like so that they could let the chefs know what was and wasn't working. Although successful in some ways, this action along with my making my own alteration of farm

lunch through cooking it myself are both ways in which I used my own agency to solve symptoms of deeper structural problems. Despite these actions as being legitimate learning experiences in my personal process, the tactic is a very limited way to go about making radical change. The same is true of my attempt to get Berta a sharper knife. Utilizing my agency to get her what she needed isn't enough. The agency and voice is not distributed evenly, that's the problem.

But it's not as if anyone wants it that way. It's not as if locavores wish to be exclusive and create white spaces impenetrable to literal "others." On the contrary, the people who end up at this particular farm are here in large part because they care about environmental and social justice enough to turn their back on the plethora of opportunities available to make a lot more money and devote their lives to feeding their community. Of course, they also care about making money. But the point is, yes, good intentions cannot prevent structural inequity from penetrating our psyches, but good intentions are certainly worth a whole lot more than bad ones.

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Whiteness and Racialization in Local Food Spaces

"While the ideals of healthy food, people and land are not intrinsically white, the objectives, tendencies, strategies, the emphases and absences and the things overlooked in community food make them so.... Community food thrives on a culture of food that has been made white. How this food is produced, packaged, promoted and sold—engages with a white middle class consumer base that tends to be interested in personal health and perhaps in environmental integrity... Here, whites come together, stick together and then become impenetrable to others despite their desire to be otherwise."

—Rachel Slocum, in Whiteness, space and alternative food practice

After my initial deep dive into farm lunch, my radical awareness of inequity seemed to expand exponentially. In my ethnographic implosion of farm lunch, we explored some of the intricacies of voice and agency, but we have yet to explore the racialized white space that the story took place in. Through semi-structured interviews with the farm owners, informal interviews with my Latinx coworkers, and my academic studies, a new story of the farm began forming in my mind, a much different and more complicated story than what the average locavore knew.

Our local small farms are going through some major but necessary growing pains, and farm owners are just beginning to talk about it amongst themselves, but few locavores have the skills or vocabulary to conceptualize or articulate the dynamics and the challenges they are facing. I am describing the activity of this paper as navigating the radical fault lines within our local food systems, and despite the fact that most locavores and farm owners wouldn't know exactly what those terms meant at first, most actors on our local farms are experiencing the rocky navigation themselves in real time. Although it is difficult to face and discuss, the process of radicalization is happening nonetheless. The historical context of structural racism on Pacific Northwest farms is leads to an exploration of where radical awareness has existed and not existed in our local food communities throughout time and where it sits on the edge of radicalization today.

In the farm lunch implosion from a previous section, we saw the many ways in which whiteness existed in an exclusionary way in the kitchen “despite their desire to be otherwise,” in the bodies of those who would eat the meal, and in the meal itself that ended up being produced, particularly in having been crafted by a non-white Indigenous migrant worker intentionally trying to cater to the white space that she was in. Understanding how whiteness is practiced and experienced on the individual level within our local food communities is essential to begin the process of rapid radicalization necessary among the hordes of locavores who do not yet know how they participate in the reproduction of racism and whiteness, and who struggle to navigate what to do with the resulting discomfort.

There is a lot of discomfort and shame involved in ethical people coming to terms with the ways in which such negative patterns are embedded within themselves. No locavore identifies with “being racist,” however all locavores reproduce racism and whiteness in many ways despite desiring nothing of the sort and despite largely being unaware of exactly how they do, me included. The oversimplified narrative around race that dominates discourse in the United States says that racism is somewhat limited to outward displays of violence and hatred, but this does not take into consideration the complicated and fuzzy ways that we all participate in reproducing racism and whiteness in our own lives—even us well-intended ethical consumers.

In Rachel Slocum’s incredibly comprehensive paper entitled *Whiteness, space and alternative food practice*, she explores how our “well-intentioned food practices reveal both the transformative potential of progressive whiteness and its capacity to become exclusionary in spite of itself.” She says,

“Certainly community food advocates and co-op shoppers would not want to exclude by their bodily presence and the way their presence links with cars, location, leisure time and specific knowledge. [Yet] exclusion occurs in many little and larger ways that work to make people uncomfortable,” (Slocum 2006)

Understanding these many little and larger ways that we all reproduce whiteness and racism is seen as leading to “a better understanding of race as it exists outside familiar patterns (oppression, subordination, complicity),” and as it exists in its many complicated forms within our local food systems at every scale. For our local food systems to truly become radical and reflexive, the need to address structural problems at every level is strong. Radicalization must exist like a Mandelbrot fractal—internationally, nationally, regionally, locally, and individually.

To say that this studying these issues has required emotional work for me personally feels quite an understatement in relation to the daily toll that the radicalization of awareness takes. Studying whiteness and how it functions begins with the process of normalizing and vocalizing the presence of shame and putting it to work in a way that goes beyond negative oppositional

politics and toward moving away from the elements of whiteness that exclude and oppress (Slocum 2006).

Just as Lane Selman at the Farming While Black panel spoke to the shame she felt over not realizing that she didn't know any black farmers in a previous section, to the discomfort that she felt in being a white woman organizing a panel of people of color, we must learn how to openly discuss that which we do not even want to admit to ourselves. It's uncomfortable to face our own unknowns, but for those of us who have the privilege to tune in and out of that discomfort, it seems quite irresponsible not to.

There is so much research coming out on the ways in which our local food systems are racialized, yet candid conversations about race in our local food communities are only just beginning to take place. Candid conversations about race are happening everywhere right now, but not often within the seemingly settled waters of our local food systems. Locavores often have an underlying understanding that local food communities are privileged spaces, but the discourse often ends there.

As Slocum highlights, the importance of "the literature on food and racial difference" lies "in the intricacies of race, power and food [that] it reveals," including the uncomfortable process that locavores experience in becoming aware of their own part in racialization (Slocum 2006). She argues for the importance of understanding how whiteness actually happens in real time within alternative food communities in order to figure out how our local food communities are working toward addressing racism and not. She writes that she studies how whites behave in local food spaces because it teaches us how "whiteness works" both to embrace and exclude difference, "perhaps simultaneously and maybe unwillingly," (Slocum 2006).

On the one hand, it can be difficult for locavores to move away from their blind love of local to make space for these serious critiques. Every root would rather grow in the path of least resistance, and it's a lot easier to not engage in such rocky personal work. But on the other hand, it can be difficult for food scholars to move away from solely critiquing all that is problematic about our local food systems and practices in order to make space for the process

of radicalization itself, or for imagining the potential that our local food systems have in addressing whiteness and racism in new ways.

We explored the ways in which academic food scholarship and local food discourse have struggled to talk to each other in a previous chapter. But there is value in pausing and looking around in this middle ground to see what there is to learn. Slocum and similar food scholars advocate for neither discounting nor repeating the many “important critiques of alternative food practice that others have made,” in the “interest of going beyond negative oppositional politics” and better understanding “how racial difference and racial connection can be better understood through [local food] practices,” (Slocum 2006).

For locavores, the hard work of critiquing our local food systems is largely done by valuing the emotional journey through shame and seeing it as productive in achieving collective food sovereignty. People who gain radical awareness seem to forget that they used to be unaware and join the hordes of in-group shaming of anyone who has yet to undergo the process, serving to further drive the social divide. Peter Stalker tells us that looking at the role of migrant labor in our local food systems is to re-open many awkward questions, and Slocum finds that this friction is necessary work to build bridges and address racism and whiteness so that universal concepts can gain traction and structural changes can be made (Stalker 2008; Slocum 2006).

“These universals have to make sense to people in their location. It is ‘through friction [that] universals become practically effective’. Friction is ‘the awkward, unequal, unstable, and creative qualities of interconnection across difference’. It can lead to new arrangements of culture and power. Friction is vicissitudinal—what happens in these encounters may be compromising or empowering, may make or unmake hegemony,” (Slocum 2006).

For many US-born, white locavores, asking awkward questions and producing friction is to embrace the discomfort and shame that results, which Slocum identifies as a first step in changing whiteness (Slocum 2006). Citing Probyn, she continues to explore how embracing

“shame and confusion is a fruitful avenue... productive of ethical relations,” and a useful tool to “self-evaluate and transform” ourselves (Slocum 2006).

“Shame matters because ‘shame promises a return of interest, joy and connection’ and it is necessary to deal with shameful pasts. Shame has to function as a means toward ethical relations among all... [as] coexistence between indigenous and non-indigenous people can succeed only with acknowledgement of different types of shame,”

Of course, to embrace shame and friction and engage in awkward conversation about race does not ensure success in moving past the racialization of our white local food spaces and has the potential to either “make or unmake hegemony,” and everything in between. Slocum emphasizes how our local food systems do create lots of joy through taking the effort to connect across differences where they do, even if the joy of connecting across race in a dominantly exclusive space does not alleviate all the problematic elements of the local food system itself.

“These examples may or may not be successful attempts at closeness and they may or may not be attempted on white terms, but they cannot be written off as the same old oppression or summarily dismissed as ‘feel good’ acts that do nothing against racial justice... One could argue that an act may not have domination in its heart, but nonetheless works to alleviate guilt in a way that fails to be accountable to history. But these are not the only possibilities. Whites are continually reaching out in appreciation, curiosity and hopefulness (among other relations). Such opening to otherness has been explained as an attempt to escape elements of white modernity... Of course, without vigilance, efforts to change dominant whiteness that use progressive social ideals can end up reinforcing it.”

To study these issues in our local food systems is to study them in specific spaces, whether it be on a local farm, at the farmers market, or on social media. Throughout this paper we have explored an introductory navigation of all of these spaces through the lens of Oregon Organics Farm specifically, and within the Willamette Valley local food community in general. In

navigating how whiteness and racism become reproduced on farm, there are many places to look. The following two sections will navigate the process of radicalization at OOF throughout time, first historically, and then over the course of the pivotal and newly radical 2018 season, via analyzing what Slocum identifies as “racial difference and racial connection,” (Slocum 2006). The concepts introduced here are essential to understand what follows.

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A Different Story—Migrant Labor & Radical Awareness at Oregon Organics Farm

Now let’s take a look at the broader history of the role of migrant labor at Oregon Organics Farm and the structural conditions that led to an increase in radical thought and action on farm over time. How have power disparities and agency existed in the awareness of the farm owners throughout time? Where has a radical awareness of race- and class-based inequalities been present in the past, throughout time, and currently on farm? We will explore what the transition from progressive to radical thought actually looks like in real time on this particular farm.

Every article written about Oregon Organics Farm is the same and the story goes something like this. The owners had a restaurant and couldn’t find quality produce to cook with, so with a handful of friends they started their own farm. Over the course of thirty years, the farm has become incredibly successful, expanding to sixty acres in production and into the agritourism industry with their on-farm farmstand and restaurant, serving as a pillar in the community. Just as OSU’s Small Farm Extension Service published,

“[The farm] is a great model of what can happen when you combine talents and a community to grow with and work in. The people side of farming can be more complicated at times than growing food. When asked about how all of these partnerships work, Jim mentioned that it

was about growing high-quality vegetables first and foremost, and then having pragmatic people that like what they do on board. According to Frank Morton of Wild Garden Seeds (another partner of OOF), “it is about finding people that have complementary not competitive interests. Then consider how that person’s passion can be something you are a part of. We are way more together than we are alone.” These partnerships expand the reach of each of these farms deep into our community and beyond,” (Garrett 2013).

As the farm’s writer, I’ve written and re-written this very same story a dozen times over, told and re-told it across the sample table at the farmers market. It’s a good story, and it’s a true story. But it’s not the whole truth, not the whole story. It is a story that says that ethically-like-minded passionate locavores are the only characters in the story. But are we really “way more together than we are alone?” Does the crew of Latinx migrant workers that essentially subsidize labor costs on local small farms fit into this story? Are they “pragmatic people that like what they do”? Is that what the partnership between small farms and migrant labor is really like?

In this section we’re looking at a different story, a story that includes migrant labor and follows the trajectory of radical awareness on farm throughout time. Just as Rachel Slocum studies the ways in which whites think and act in local food spaces, and just as Margaret Gray explored the ways in which farm owners viewed the migrant workers on their farms and the associated labor challenges, this story is framed by the farm owners’ perspectives. Like my own perspective, this story comes with unique insights and unique blind spots. This is in no way a comprehensive alternative story, but rather the beginning of a different story. Further research is needed to include the voices of the migrant workers themselves. To understand how the role of migrant labor and whiteness has existed and changed at Oregon Organics Farm throughout its history, we’ll start with the first time the owners hired migrant labor and why.

The longtime foreman at OOF was the first migrant worker that the owners hired. One day they were digging potatoes up in a greenhouse in one of their first few years farming when a car pulled up and the foreman-to-be got out with his US-born wife. Speaking no English, his wife spoke for him and asked if they had work for him. Jim said, “yeah, we had work, and we said sure, we’ll try it out. And uh, [the foreman] showed up for work, worked like crazy.”

Nancy followed up saying, “I mean, Jim and I were just trying to figure farming out. You know, labor needs were like, ‘Oh yeah, we need help.’ You know, it wasn’t a contemplative plan.” The foreman had two friends who joined him at the farm, Jim thought he remembered them being from the same town. He continued, “at that point I would say, [the foreman] was just working his butt off.... All of us were working our butt off. And it felt pretty family-oriented. We shared birthday parties, and um, yeah.” Expanding on that time, the owners commented,

“It was a trend in the Valley. Joe’s farm [Farm A] was doing the same, Gary’s [Farm B] was doing the same. It was a trend in this general area... [The foreman] was saying, you know, all of these Oaxacans were coming into Corvallis, so it seemed like they were calling back home or something and saying, like, there’s work in this area. So, it seemed like it paralleled, it wasn’t just OOF. There was this work force up here, and we were all like, oh, they want to work,” said Nancy.

“And there was, you know, an authoritative nature, top down, of that crew. I will say that I really fought that hard for a long time with [the foreman] and with the crew in general, because I’ve always worked under a principle of cooperation and you know, that the people on the bottom, the most hands-on, have a lot of knowledge that should go up and should be a part of the decision-making process. You know, but with [the Foreman] it was always a top down kind of thing... And I really fought that for a long time, but you know I just couldn’t get buy-in from anybody on that Mexican crew that that was how things should be done. Everybody on that crew at that time seemed to buy into, you know, “we have a boss, boss tells us what to do, we do it, this is the way it’s done.” And you know, I’ll admit to just giving up on that,” lamented Jim.

I saw here that Jim struggled knowing how to bridge the gap between the migrant workers on his farm and himself. He shows a general discomfort with the hierarchical structure that seemed to be underlying life on his migrant crew and with his inability to change it. He even espouses more radical beliefs, valuing less hierarchical and more organic, bottom-up social structures (Merchant 2005, p152).

Of course, we can also see the red flags all over Jim's comment, pointing to the culture of silence that was perpetuated on the crew by the foreman's action and the owners' inaction. But those red flags weren't so visible for a time for the owners. I've spoken with the owners so many times and watched as they interrupt their own recollection of that time period with a face palm, saying,

"I readily admit to, you know, being so naive and not seeing cues about where [the foreman] was headed... You know, I, Jim and I are to a fault, just too trusting and naive... [People] cut me up about when I say I'm naive. But I'm like... "live in my shoes, you don't know what it's like to be in my shoes." I'm not going out there intentionally saying, you know, "[foreman], have this power." You know, I'm just clueless. Call it stupidity. I don't care, I admit to all of that." — Nancy

The degree to which the owners were ignorant of the consequences of the power dynamics on the field crew is a debate on its own that goes beyond the scope of this story. But from that early period of time in the late eighties where OOF had about three Latinx employees and six US-born and everyone worked together, to the 2000's when the field crew was its own separate entity and social justice issues on the crew started coming into the light, the owners seem to have been focusing on other issues in their lives rather than the innerworkings of the field crew, and seem to have lacked a great deal of awareness of the power dynamics and issues of agency on farm, as did the rest of the dominant population at the time.

"It's hard for me to articulate all the different phases. It seems like we went from family, little atmosphere, to boom, this is a big thing. [The foreman's] got a lot of Hispanic people working for him. We're really unfamiliar with their culture. We're trying to learn about their culture... maybe it's because we were growing so fast, the labor just kept increasing, the land kept increasing, we made the farmstand, oh now we got a restaurant, now we got a kid in high school, you know," Nancy recalled.

Notice how they say that the foreman has a lot of "people working for him." We can see how separate they felt from their migrant workers during that period of the farm's history, despite

feeling familial relationships as well. From one perspective, the foreman was the one that wanted to work there, he was the one telling them that he knew people that needed work, he trained them, he worked with them, and he decided if they were “good workers” or not, and the owners trusted him. I understand that that is all kinds of problematic and a recipe for disaster, but it was also simply general practice on farms that hire migrant labor and still is.

And, I see the validity in elements of the above quote. That is quite a whirlwind, becoming one of the top three organic farms that serves your local community that has a more diversified sales system than any other. I’m not taking away from the work put in by an invisible Latinx labor force, but I’m saying the owners are humans, that was a lot, and I hear them. I think that they felt good that they could provide a better workplace for migrant people in need than they might find at a conventional farm, and they were generous with their more vulnerable employees in many ways and continue to be. And they are extremely generous with all their employees. We’ll go into ways in which that generosity can backfire later.

I continued to ask the owners about what conversations between organic farmers were like in the valley at that time regarding hiring migrant labor.

“One conversation I really remember, was early, early on when Farm C said, “You know, we’re not going that way. All of you guys are but we’re not.” And I was like, “Why Bill?” And he’s like, “because I don’t speak fluent Spanish and I don’t feel comfortable.” And that actually has come to me more often than not recently. Like, would it have made more of a difference if I had spoken fluent Spanish? Part of me says it would have really helped. But part of me says, no, I’m the owner, and they would have never probably come to me with these issues,” said Nancy.

“I mean [Farm B’s] not without problems and [the owner] speaks fluent Spanish. Not that I don’t think that would have been better, that’s certainly one of my regrets, you know, the inability to communicate on a level, or to understand the communications that were going on in the field,” said Jim.

Here, I see that the owners regret not having learned Spanish when they decided to hire Spanish-speaking employees, while also recognizing that the language barrier is only part of a much bigger power dynamic that worked to strip people of their voice. I also see that they not only say that they felt unaware of issues around agency and power dynamics, but that they didn't understand the nuances of how power dynamics can affect worker voice despite valuing otherwise.

I was surprised to hear that Jim and Nancy didn't hire migrant labor due to an inability to find other types of labor, namely, US-born labor. That's the argument we hear these days, that US-born individuals aren't willing to work field jobs, that farmers can't find US-born labor and so they hire migrant workers as a last resort. Many farms even post job postings in obscure newspapers that no one will ever respond to just to be able to use that excuse. But from how Jim describes it, the transition to migrant labor at OOF felt more passive:

"I think that the movement to the Hispanic crew was fueled largely by the fact that that was a pool of labor that was readily available, and pretty much whenever you said we should have a couple more people, they were there. And the pool of labor from... a real pragmatic standpoint was of a labor pool that was much more dependable and much more efficient in their work than the comparable people that we brought on or had on the crew. You know, they were people that would stay for a long time. You would train them and they'd stay here for five years or ten years. They kept staying, basically. They didn't go away, whereas other people you'd hire and they'd be here for a season and they'd go away."— Jim

Although the transition to migrant labor could be seen as passive in one regard—that some people just stayed longer than others—Jim also clearly values groups of people as being better workers than others. And from a farm owner's perspective where securing a consistent labor force is one the greatest challenges to address every season, it makes sense that owners would value a labor force that seemed to work physically harder and stay on farm consistently.

As I spoke with Jim and Nancy about their experiences, I thought about how little research there is looking at how small-scale organic farmers have thought about and related to migrant

labor. The owners themselves had only just started having conversations about these issues with other farmers in the area, some of whom practice radical thought regularly, and some of whom still have migrant crews run by a foreman who holds all the power and don't understand what could possibly go wrong. At a recent PNW organic farmer gathering, Nancy said she spoke with one such farmer and said, "you can't just assume that they're taking care of each other."

Radical thought has been in the dark for a long time. It's new to most people, particularly to the dominant population in this country, whether you're a small farmer or an industrial farmer, a locavore or a mainstream consumer. We can see how in the 80's and 90's when the Willamette Valley's most prominent small local organic farms were first forming, different people related to migrant workers in different ways. In a world of rapidly shifting social norms, it's important that we remember that the #MeToo movement has only just begun, that we live in a very recent time where "racial equity" and "people of color" are common phrases in our vernacular, and that migrant labor still has almost never been discussed in relation to *local* farms. The majority of us reading this (or at least the majority of our parents) probably would not have been keen on seeing the power disparities that seem so ridiculously visible to us right now, had we been the owners during that period of time with their experiences as the only ones we had to draw from. I'm not making any excuses for ignorance and the reproduction of oppression it bequeaths, but this story is simply incomplete outside of its historical context.

Yes, there are most definitely ways in which the owners at the farm have been ignorant of many issues that are just coming into the light in society today, and only just beginning to make radical changes on farm. It's uncomfortable for people to understand that even people with the best of intentions have many blind spots that can inherently harm some of the most vulnerable people in our local food communities. We look up to our local farmers, and it's hard for us to come to terms with the ways in which they are problematic. But the thing is, it's not just our local farmers who are problematic. We are all problematic, especially if you're a locavore.

There are some locavores who might feel the need to jump on the shaming bandwagon, upset that producers of ethical food weren't already experts on addressing the power disparities present on their farm, and I know that because I'm one of them. But I cannot help but think

about how important all of the problematic and predominantly white leaders in our local food systems have been in building up local food communities to the point where they're at now. Does the fact that they are problematic and are in the process of radicalization mean that they deserve our shaming? Or that they no longer deserve our support? Should we boycott all our local small farms who hire migrant labor and manage migrant laborers in problematic ways? I don't think so. We have to push and support our local farms in radicalizing their practices in whatever ways the workers see best. We have to continue to enjoy and appreciate our local produce and also understand what's problematic about it and in need of changing. It's a special kind of flavor of cognitive dissonance just for locavores, from farm to table.

I feel uncomfortable saying that problematic farm owners, or anyone for that matter, is either an angel or a demon. The farmers who we idolized yesterday we might suddenly hate or feel conflicted about today, and I want to explore that transition with historical context. Thinking back to the amazing farmworker justice activism done by Cesar Chavez and Dolores Huerta, this duality is particularly evident. Everyone knows Cesar Chavez's name, and that the work that he did was revolutionary for farmworkers. And yet it's also true that he overshadowed Dolores Huerta because she was a woman, and that he excluded Indigenous people from his cause. There was a lot of sexism and intercultural racism normalized in his world.

Dolores Huerta herself persevered to fight for women's rights alongside farmworker rights, but for a long time even she butted heads with feminists for being pro-life, largely due to her Catholic upbringing (Bratt 2017). Many years and eleven children later, she had a shift in consciousness and decided that it would actually be really valuable for women to have control over their own reproduction. No one is safe from the paradigms that history embeds within us all, and we are all problematic. What matters is how we navigate the journey through the problematique.

We're used to hearing about power dynamics and instances of abuse on industrial farms, in Hollywood and in news rooms, but it is way more upsetting to think that this is happening at our favorite local farm because we trusted our local organic farmers to sell us ethically-produced vegetables. It can feel like a betrayal of trust. But it's not as easy to turn your back on

your local small farms as it is to turn them on corporate CEOs. And yet, although we have trusted local organic produce to be ethically-produced, farmers and consumers alike tend to talk a whole lot more about the environment than they do about racial equity, although that's beginning to change. Organic is just about what kind of inputs you use. Local has been reduced to being defined by the distance from the farm to you. Where's the social justice at?

We locavores are complicit in not knowing the role that migrant workers play in our local food systems. How many of you reading this were surprised to really hear that all the major organic farms at the PSU farmers market hire largely segregated Latinx migrant labor? How many of you have ever asked your farmer a question about their labor force instead of about a tomato variety? When's the last time you saw voting on immigration legislation as directly connected to your identity as an ethical eater as your trip to the farmers market? This awareness has not been present in local food discourse, farm owner and locavore alike, especially in Oregon.

The farm owners in this country have always been white, and they've only been getting whiter. And because African Americans were historically the farmworkers in the United States, before and "after" slavery, they were excluded from other labor rights that everyone else in society benefits from—just a few things like minimum wage, the forty-hour work week, the right to bargain, overtime, paid sick time, health benefits, etc. And once African Americans started demanding better treatment, there is documented evidence in other parts of the country that farmers and the state worked together to deny farm labor jobs to black people and transition toward a largely undocumented migrant labor force (Gray 2013). These types of ethnic successions are still common on farms. The farm labor exemptions that continue to subsidize labor on our local small farms carry directly over from the pre-Civil War era and continue to racialize and oppress marginalized people today. Although Oregon is not traditionally a gateway state, it now ranks 11th in the nation for incoming refugees and at least 10% of the population is foreign-born, predominantly of Latinx descent (Bussel 2008). In Oregon specifically there has been a recent influx of specifically Indigenous Mexican and Guatemalan immigrants on farms (Bussel 2008), which matches the demographics of the OOF harvest crew perfectly. The ethnic successions of folks who fill farm labor positions continue to shift, but regardless of who is in

the labor role at the time, the role of labor itself is no doubt a racialized position rife with inequity.

So, we know that Oregon is a particularly racist state, that it's a particularly agricultural state, and that agriculture is particularly racist. We're supposed to be everything that industrial agriculture isn't. But industrial agriculture (and the current Capitalist system at large) functions by devaluing and robbing wealth from both the environment and human labor. Yet our local food systems have largely retained the labor issues and structural racism that agriculture in this country is known for.

Perhaps if we consider the ways in which we've never thought about migrant labor in relation to our local food, or the ways in which our local food movements have done nothing to combat structural racism, perhaps we might understand how older, whiter, less woke Oregonian farmers might be particularly slow to see the connection themselves, or particularly backwards in the way that they think about these issues, no matter how obvious it seems to others now.

Over the past radical year, owners spend dozens and even hundreds of hours talking with all of their employees, Latinx migrant workers and US-born locavores alike, trying to get an idea about how best to move forward, about how strong of mechanisms need to be put in place to make sure that everyone has a voice. Most of these conversations took place between a single worker and perhaps their manager, a Latinx translator and advocate, and one or both of the farm owners, and they generally took place at the owners' kitchen table in their house on the farm. One series of interviews were technically work performances scheduled weeks in advance so that one English-speaker and one Spanish-speaker was interviewed each day until everyone had met with the owners. But there was also space made during these meetings to voice issues in the workplace. Other conversations were scheduled more privately, either with workers' requesting meetings with the owners or vice versa. Engaging in these radical conversations that aimed to incorporate worker voice is one major way that radicalization is occurring on farm.

One day this winter, sitting at their kitchen table, the owners and I had a particularly important conversation about the intricacies of voice that I want to share with you. I had just read the

section on paternalism in *Labor and the Locavore* by Margaret Gray (which we explored in a previous chapter) and was describing it to the owners. They've helped their migrant workers out in a plethora of ways that I highly respect them for, but as we learned in *Labor and the Locavore*, such generosity can have serious side effects because of the power dynamics that can subvert the relationship of care. I said that Gray describes paternalism on local small farms as,

Laura: "as the inverse of that close face-to-face farmer interaction, where on farm... the owners of the farm, are in such close relations and have such close relationships with these employees, with the migrant workers... [and] normally we see that as family, good. But...they did these interviews where, when migrant farmworkers received gifts from their employers, whether it was extra bonuses, help going to doctor visits, help with cars, with getting citizenship, with getting their kids access to something at school, all of those different things... [in the] follow up interviews with the farmworkers they said... "Now, if there was money missing from your paycheck, or if this type of abuse happened,"— it kept extending the situation— "if this happened, if that happened, would you speak up?""

Nancy: "And they say no?"

Laura: "Unanimously, all of them said, Well I, I just could never. These people give me everything. I would never say anything."

Nancy: "So that, I mean, that's who we are. But my awareness isn't even that, you know... that that's even a factor in my generosity."

Jim: "Well, if you're white and privileged and you are employing people that are not and you have opportunities—"

Nancy: "—to help them. Why wouldn't you?"

Jim: “— and resources to help them in some way that—you know, it seems like—I can hear what you’re saying, but...[then I’m] saying, “Well I don’t want this to color how you feel about things in the future, I’m not going to help you out.””

Nancy: “Yeah but what I’m hearing is, Jim, is it doesn’t mean we don’t have to be generous, but they still don’t have a voice to speak up.”

Laura: “Right,”

Nancy: “That’s all. That’s what it’s saying, is they don’t have a voice. They’re scared... They’re, you know, they need this job. I get it. I mean, I don’t get it, because I don’t live it, but I have an understanding.”

These are the types of conversations that the owners and I have at OOF all the time. They take a lot of time and energy from us all. And for as much as I might wish that I didn’t have to describe these concepts to them, for as much as I often feel that it is unacceptable for the owners of a farm that employs migrant labor to not already have an understanding of these issues, I have to remind myself that I didn’t understand the nuances of vulnerability until quite recently either. This situation inspired me to get educated on these issues, but I was just as clueless once too.

When I look at that conversation, I see the owners as people who are really trying to wrap their minds around these issues and provide the best working environment for their employees as they can, even if they haven’t been putting in that same level of attention throughout the years (and even if Nancy is often a few steps ahead of Jim). I see good people who are making the right shifts in consciousness even if it’s slower than we might prefer. What is the appropriate pace for radicalization anyway?

I think these farm owners are still the same old hippie farmers that we’ve all looked up to as pillars in our farming and food community. You don’t go into small-scale organic farming for the money and the easy life. They care deeply about growing good healthy food for the earth, for

their community, and for all their employees. They are ethical people in many ways. All of the beautiful things about the farm are still true. And ample effort is being made to radicalize life on the farm, even if the process of doing so is messy, awkward, and nonlinear.

Can we hold both things true in our minds at once, though? Are we comfortable saying that the farm owners are good, ethical people who are also responsible for further reproducing racism and whiteness on their farm? Can we accept the ways in which we all reproduce racism and whiteness in our own lives, either through action or inaction alike? Does the work of Cesar Chavez no longer matter because of the ways in which he was problematic and reproduced racism? Does the work of Dolores Huerta not matter because it took her years to become pro-choice? Was her pace of radicalization too slow? Does the work done by our local farm owners no longer matter because of the ways in which they are problematic?

Regardless, the owners are transitioning toward retirement, new mechanisms on the farm are being experimented with to promote equity, and radicalization is well under way. The following section explores the 2018 season where the most radical thought and structural change began being employed on farm, and incredibly challenging and also rewarding social dynamics ensued. There are many lessons to be learned from this unique season in our local food community, so much more to the reality of life on our local small farms than what meets the locavore's eye. Buckle up. The road toward radicalization is a bumpy one.



Chapter V. Rocky Radicalization—The Pivotal 2018 Season in the Fields

“community food efforts currently also enable an intimacy that results in collective sadness because it is based on the closeness of similar people... collective joy has to do with bodies engaging with other bodies in good ways. Segregation of any sort makes for collective sadness because people are not engaging with each other. Collective joy is found and increased in the mixing of bodies.... As multiplicity, race can change so that neither whiteness nor brownness results in supremacy or any other familiar, negative association that denies people their complexity and humanity... Whiteness, capable of endlessly transforming itself, can change its tendency to reproduce and enforce racial oppression... what happens in these encounters may be compromising or empowering, may make or unmake hegemony.” (Slocum 2006)

Introduction

This final chapter highlights what made the 2018 season at Oregon Organics Farm the most radical on record. With the historically segregated Latinx field crew’s first year of significant integration with white US-born employees, as well as the first year of crew segregation by gender, the season offers us much to learn from on the edge of radicalization. In a climate where hierarchy and patriarchy had prevailed for so long, what does the process of dismantling them look like? For one Indigenous Guatemalan woman who became the manager of the women’s crew, challenges in managing both Latinx women who weren’t used to taking orders from other women as well as *chicas americanas* who don’t speak much Spanish and struggle to pull their own weight was a significant challenge. These new interracial social dynamics caused tension between individuals from all areas of the intersectional identity spectrum.

As I worked on the women’s crew, much of my research draws from the experiences had, challenges faced, and relationships made between Indigenous Latinx women farmworkers and white US-born locavore women. As Rachel Slocum explores, a mixing of bodies in place of

segregation can serve to “make or unmake hegemony,” and in this chapter can begin to understand the ways in which on farm radicalization and desegregation have the potential to both make and unmake hegemony as well.

Issues in communication and work parity on the crew came to a climax early in the season, resulting in an employee communication workshop held by human resources, management, and a Latinx translator/advocate. The workshop served as a space for everyone to vocalize and address their opinions, concerns, and frustrations, revealing the unique challenges to overcoming both language and cultural barriers in the workplace.

I end the section on the pivotal 2018 season in the fields by introducing a discussion of the potential benefits of the mixing of bodies on the crew. In general, desegregation is a good thing, however the benefits of it don’t seem to get distributed equally in this particular situation. *Las chicas americanas* [the American girls] on the crew tended to vocalize their experiences on the crew as life-changing, while some Latinx women recalled the season as no different and others recalled it as fun at times and challenging at others. The limitations of the mixing of bodies is therefore explored, giving way to the conclusion that a more radical and rigorous approach to dismantling structural problems on our local small farms, in our food systems, and beyond is needed.

To work on the harvest crew at Oregon Organics Farm during the 2018 season was to live the most dramatic and timely reality tv show exemplifying the complicated reality of life on our local small farms. Every morning, about all twenty of us gathered in a big circle in the middle of the packing shed. People scrambled about pulling up trucks and loading up harvest totes, sharpening knives and getting coffee. Together, the English-speaking female farm owner and the Spanish-speaking male field crew manager would announce in their respective languages the plan for the day, and then the farm’s bilingual on-farm Latinx advocate would translate their words to the rest of us into either Spanish or English.

Looking around the circle, there was such a unique mixture of bodies and minds. There were Latinx men and women who had worked at the farm for years and who I knew quite well, as

well as some new additions to the season. There were folks from urban areas in Jalisco who had never worked on a farm, and folks from mountainous farming communities in Oaxaca and Guatemala. There were white US-born locavores fresh out of university from all across the US, a dark-skinned man from Malawi experienced in goat butchering and leading tourist groups through Malawi's wildlands, and a Venezuelan-born-Miami-raised Latinx female farmworker advocate and holistic doctor who is married to the white, US-born female crop and irrigation manager. There was me, a white US-born Turkish woman, and my partner, a Florida-raised Honduran with an obsession for learning Indigenous languages. And there were our best friends, a sweet-hearted rowdy-mouthed Texan couple turned punk vagabond farmers dripping with tattoos. My favorite tattoo was Rosy the Riveter gripping a fat bunch of carrots.

The morning meeting was new this year. Historically, only the foreman would meet with management about the plan for the day, and the big picture was not shared with workers. You would get into a truck and it would stop in a field and you'd be handed twist ties and it was understood that you were there to bunch what was in that field. Once the twist ties were gone, you would get back in the truck, be dropped off somewhere else with more twist ties, and this would repeat throughout the day. If you were a Spanish-speaking migrant worker, your time card would be held by the foreman and he would record your hours for the day. If you ever needed time off, you would speak with the foreman privately, which could go a variety of ways.

This year, all of that changed. Each morning began with employees clocking in with their fingerprint on a mechanized system that was approachable to people regardless of literacy and gave workers autonomy over their own hours that they never had before. In addition, each morning one of the crew leaders would ask, "Is there anyone that needs to leave early today or take time off later this week?" Folks would raise their hands, say what they needed, and it would be added onto a calendar in the packing shed. Employees now had the opportunity to take time off without fear of retribution in a space where they were encouraged to take time off as needed. Changes were beginning.

Rather than the pick sheet and the day's plant remaining in the hands of a single foreman, each crew had a board that listed what crops they'd be harvesting in which order, which were written up by the Spanish-speaking managers in the beautiful broken Spanglish that dominates conversation at the farm, as seen in Figure 7. These boards are updated each morning and now live in the crew trucks for the day so that everyone had access to the plan.

The owners also emphasized regularly that the morning meetings should be spaces for everyone to voice their questions and opinions, a new space for discussion about how tall we should prune tomatoes to, whether or not scissors will spread disease, or whether or not we should abandon a cucumber house riddled with aphids. It was also a time to voice problems on the crew that needed addressing, such as inefficient field transitions and personal disputes. Workers who had never had a space to voice anything, who didn't even have control over their own time card, finally had some agency.

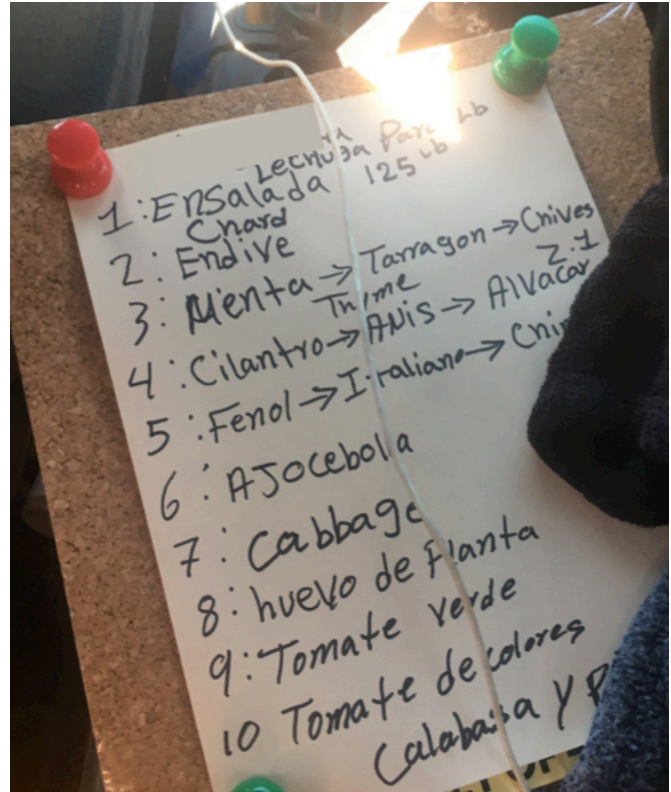


Figure 7. Harvest board for the Women's crew from Thursday, July 26th, 2018. You can see how some Spanish words are used, some English words, and some Spanglish—my favorite of which being “Ajocebola,” which translates literally as “garlic-onion” and refers to shallots, which are a garlic onion cross, and “huevo de planta,” which translates literally to “egg of plant” but refers to eggplant. The Spanish word for Eggplant is “berenjena,” but no one at the farm uses it.

Only, it was also the first year that the crew was segregated by gender into a men's crew and a women's crew. Say what now? You heard me. It's 2018 on a small organic farm in Oregon and at each morning meeting's end, the men would grab their harvest list and the women would grab theirs, and that beautiful mixture of bodies would break off into opposite directions. I would share an odd glance with my partner as he and the rest of the men shuffled off to their

trucks parked off the south side of the packing shed before scuffling out the north side myself to join the rest of the women, and off we would go. My first day back in the field on Tuesday, June 26th, I reflected on this in my field notes.

About twenty of us stood in a rough circle in the packing shed at 7:00 and Nancy and Serapio announced logistics for the day and for the upcoming month, and Genesis assisted in translation. They described generally what each crew would be doing that day and where. Nancy brought out the calendar with everyone's schedule on it and talked about communicating needing days off. This kind of communication is so entirely new to OOF, I stood there amazed as everyone stood around bored and sleepy. Within a few minutes it was over and I stood still as all the men walked to the trucks lined up on one side of the barn and the women walked to the trucks lined up on the other side. I shook off the strangeness of the situation and walked over to the suburban.

• • •

Hierarchy & Patriarchy

So why was the crew separated by gender, you ask? The removal of the farm's longtime foreman called for a restructuring of the crew in 2018. After the foreman's firing, it was unclear whether or not he was the only problem or the extent to which there was a culture of inappropriate behavior among other members of the crew—essentially, it was not known whether or not any or all of the men could be trusted around the women, and management felt unable to know for sure having been in the dark for so long. They knew of the culture of silence that the foreman had instilled was still present, and that even interviewing all employees may not result in full information, but they did not want to do a sweep firing of all their male workers. Not knowing what to do to best keep people safe, management ended up deciding to segregate their longtime migrant crew by gender temporarily and hire multiple Latinx

advocates to talk with workers on a regular basis about their working conditions and concerns, one of whom worked on the crew with the women, and one who served as the farm's translator. They also met with male migrant workers informed them of the strict enforcement they were placing on them all, outlining precisely what kind of talk and behavior would result in official write-ups and to being fired.

Having two crews now meant that there were now two crew managers, and one of them was a woman. This created a situation where one Guatemalan woman, Martina, stepped into her first management position in her life. Martina and I started working on the farm the same season. I remember being seventeen and sitting on milk crates as we clipped stems and roots off of dried garlic in a hot hoop house and talked about how she missed her daughter who was about my age. That was seven years ago, and she still misses her.

But just because Martina was manager of the women's crew didn't mean that she was of equal status with the men's crew leader, Serapio. Serapio was the men's crew manager, but he was also sort of the foreman of both crews and had the ultimate say in many situations. After all, she had six years of experience on the farm but no prior farming experience, and Serapio had over twenty years of experience at the farm and grew up farming in Oaxaca. But Serapio was also the fired foreman's brother. The power dynamics of this situation were very problematic, as we will see in the following exploration of the 2018 season. As of the 2019 season, Serapio now does solo field prep and the next-longest-standing employee became the manager of the men's crew and only the men's crew.

Multiple times throughout the season, there were issues with Martina's authority not being respected by Serapio, other men on the crew, and particularly by other women. Not only was it her first time managing anyone, but she was the first female manager up against twenty years of hierarchy and patriarchy on the crew. And on top of that, it was the first year where the crews were integrated with English-speakers, who she had to manage across a pretty thick language barrier. Martina speaks Mam primarily and forgets Spanish words on occasion. She understands some English, but hardly speaks it. And now she was in charge of training and managing women who don't speak Spanish and have never worked at the farm, in addition to

Latinx women, many of whom were not happy about management selecting her to lead. On a Tuesday afternoon in August, Martina told me about how much easier her life would be if only she were a man, as I reflected upon in my fieldnotes:

While enrollando los pepinos [trellising the cucumbers] this afternoon, Martina started talking about how she wishes she was born a man. I didn't understand at first and she repeated, "nacer un hombre," [to be born a man]. She said that if she was a man then she could work more, earn more, and come home with dinner ready and not have to cook or clean. I tried to tell her that women were just as strong as men if not stronger, and that the world was changing, but she didn't empathize with that at all. That wasn't real for her at all. I felt the heaviness of her comment mix with the oppressive heat of the humid hundred-foot cuke house full of respiring plants that fondled our bodies as we moved through it. I gathered myself and in Spanish I said, "and then you could pee standing up, right?" She laughed heartily and used a cucumber as a prop to display just how she'd do it.

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["This is not, like, the white people talking to the Mexicans"](#)

By the time I joined the crew for the 2018 season, the school year had just ended, and it was already late June. I wasn't there the day the crew was split into two, or the day that English-speaking US-born locavores started becoming incorporated onto the crew. By the time I joined the crew, both clashes and connections between people of all backgrounds were happening daily, and rocky radicalization was already well under way.

My first day back, we went into the back field and harvested cut salad mix, bunched pearl onions that were peeking out through Canadian thistles, red beets, tarragon, basil, cucumbers, zucchini, black kale, boysenberries, raspberries, and strawberries. And once we were finished,

we trellised cucumbers until just before dark. And that was just the women's crew. The men's crew had their own list equally as long.

We are the harvest crew of a sixty-acre organic farm that feeds the Portland and Corvallis local food community. Every piece of produce that brings in over two million dollars in gross sales annually passes through our hands. But so much more happens throughout the day than harvest. To be able to harvest up to ninety different varieties of specialty produce across sixty acres for farmers markets, CSA's, restaurants, grocery stores, wholesale, and more—that requires teamwork and communication. This crew will pretty much spend sun-up to sun-down working together in the weather almost year-round.

Without the familiar hierarchical, patriarchal, and segregated structure defining terms of communication and working conditions, it became so challenging to navigate daily tasks on the crew that by the second week I was back in the field, the owners called for a two-hour farm-wide communication workshop and paid pizza lunch, complete with a hired translator from the community who was from Mexico herself. The meeting would be hosted by Nancy, one of the farm's owners, and Helen, the farm's HR consultant. I was wary of two white women structuring and leading the conversation, but they underwent many interviews with Latinx employees describing their grievances and factored their thoughts into the planning for the event.

Members of the field crew, Latinx and white alike, had all been coming to management daily with complaints and concerns regarding interpersonal issues with the people who they worked with. Some of the Latinx women were voicing complaints that Martina expected more from them than from *las chicas americanas* and they didn't feel it was fair. Now that there wasn't a man at the head of the crew, when it came time to decide what size to harvest eggplant, or what tool to use to prune tomatoes, Martina would say what to do, but then another woman would speak up and say that the opposite should actually be done. And with Genesis on the crew, defining authority became even more complicated.

Genesis was married to the farm's crop manager of over twenty years, and she knew each variety of specialty produce intimately and how it should be harvested, having previous experience herself. Many of the women didn't want to take direction from her either, even though she was there to be a fellow female Latinx advocate and support Martina. Many of the Latinx women on the crew constantly wanted to confirm what they were supposed to do by calling Serapio, the leader of the men's crew, and some of them took it upon themselves to do so behind Martina's back. Some days, all of us would be pruning tomatoes in a greenhouse three different ways, having to take sides by choosing which way to work.

The men's crew was having similar problems, as I heard of often from my partner. As was the packing shed crew, which had historically been a more mixed space. And even though they were separate, the management team and the office crew weren't doing so hot on their communication game either. With their days filled with addressing employee concerns and hardly on farming anymore, the owners decided to hold the very first bilingual, farm-wide communication workshop.

It was 1:00 pm on a Thursday, and all of us from the field crew sprayed the mud off our boots before entering the packing shed. We were joined by the greenhouse crew, the irrigation crew, the cultivation team, the office crew, and the packing shed. Before settling down into the familiar picnic tables, we all dished up the pizza and lemonade that the farm bought for the occasion. There were orange creamsicles and fudgesicles to follow. Once we had all nestled in with our pizza, Nancy kicked off the workshop, interspersed with Sofia's Spanish translation. She said that although we're a farm and our purpose is to grow beautiful vegetables, it's equally as important to her and Jim that we have quality communication between one another.

Helen, the HR consultant, explained that we would be getting into our working groups and talk with each other about how we could work together better. She emphasized that it's not about right or wrong, or good or bad, but about what would help us to communicate better. We were to have ten minutes to discuss what's working on our crews and what's not. People got up and shuffled around to sit with their respective crew members, and before all the women gathered around, one woman, Adela, was already telling Sofia the translator her concerns.

Once the entire women's crew were all at the table, Sofia translated Adela's concerns into English. Adela noted that during transitions, there are often multiple people saying multiple different things about what we're supposed to be doing. She said that people are really confused and don't know what to do, and that they just want one person to tell them what to do.

We can see here how Adela, and a small handful of other women who she was representing, is confused about who to listen to during field transitions about what the plan is or how to go about completing a task. Without the familiar hierarchy on the crew, who were people supposed to listen to? Who has the ultimate authority? After Sofia finished translating, Adela continued in Spanish to explain herself. Meanwhile Logan, who together with Gabriela was in charge of writing down our group's strengths and weakness, muttered under her breath, "one announcement per transition" as she wrote it on our piece of butcher paper.

Adela finishes and Sofia translates her words into English once more. She says that we all need to function as a team, but that sometimes some people talk more than they work, and she wants everyone to know that if you can't work and talk at the same time, then you need to not talk. You need to work. She didn't specify who she was referring to, but I watched as a wave of discomfort fell over *las chicas americanas*.

Helen announces at this point that there is only five minutes left in the workshop, and the reality of how long the translation game takes set in. So far only one person had been heard. Logan, Gabriela, and Genesis discuss in English how to write that down as our second bullet point, and Genesis concludes that we need "parity in work performance." Sofia translates this back into Spanish, and Rhonda, an US-born locavore who had been on the crew for over a month, added in that she notices that she's going slower than other people sometimes, and that she wants to try harder, but that it would be really helpful if someone would inform her that she needed to "pick it up a notch." She assured the group that she welcomes such feedback.

Miranda, another *chica americana* and fellow grad student who was visibly concerned added, “nobody tells us that we’re going slow, so we don’t know that we’re going slow.” What does Miranda mean when she says “us”? Sofia translates Rhonda’s Miranda’s comments into Spanish, Adela responds in Spanish, and Sofia translates her words into English. Sofia described it by saying that when “you guys” actually approach “any of them” to confirm whether or not the bunch is good or bad, that “they always try to help you.”

Quite quickly, we can see a racial dichotomy being reproduced. Miranda was the first to say “us” which implied that she was referring to her and the other *chicas americanas*. Before that, Adela’s complaint about people not working and talking at the same time could have been meant for anyone. There were certainly a couple new Latinx members of the women’s crew that struggled with this, not just *las chicas americanas*. Sofia reproduced this dichotomy when she using simple words such as “you” and “them.” This continued throughout the workshop.

Rhonda confirmed Adela’s sentiment and said that whenever she gets feedback it’s really helpful. Sofia translates this into Spanish, and then Gabriela speaks to a new issue. Sofia translates her concern back into English, saying that it’s not good to bunch up into groups together in the field, that it’s better to spread out evenly throughout the field and not over-pick and deplete any one area.

Another *chica americana*, Bella, replied that sometimes she doesn’t know where she’s supposed to go. Logan added in that communication about where the best harvest is could be helpful. We can see how some of the Latinx women often feel that *las chicas americanas* could be doing a better job, but that this seems to be news to *las chicas americanas* who say that they want criticism and direction, even if they do want it in the form of what one *chica americana* called “positive reminders.”

Gabriela spoke up again in Spanish, and Sofia translated her words into English, saying, “you guys come here to work.” She extrapolated that if “if you guys” have any interpersonal problems with other workers, you need to leave that outside of the workplace. Here, “you guys” does not necessarily imply that only *las chicas americanas* are being addressed. Because I

converse regularly with Gabriela and Martina and many of the other Spanish-speaking women, I knew that Gabriela's comment was not directed at *las chicas americanas* at all, and that she was simply bringing up another issue to be added onto our board. I knew that Gabriela was referring to a couple of the new Latinx hires.

But in the tangle of translation, for those of us who aren't fluently bilingual, it's difficult to know who is responding to what, and who is just saying something new to add to our list. Sydney, another of *las chicas americanas*, assumed that Gabriela's comment was directed at *las chicas americanas*. Visibly upset, she replied,

"I just want to be super clear that this is not like, the white people talking to the Mexicans, and the Mexicans talking to the white people."

Logan confirmed this sentiment, saying that we're all a team and that the language barrier doesn't mean that we aren't all on the same team. Although Sydney was responding to a comment that was not actually directed at her or any of the "white people," and was actually about an issue between a specific few of the Latinx women, she emphasized that she was uncomfortable with the duality present throughout the conversation between *las chicas americanas* and the Latinx women, as if the communication workshop was designed specifically to help white and brown bodies to get along. And I see validity in her confusion. The general use of the words *you*, *us*, and *them*, served quite clearly to make people feel that there was an us-versus-them social framework.

In her comment, Sydney also referred to the Latinx women monolithically as "the Mexicans" when not all of them are Mexican. This is terribly offensive. How did she not notice that there were also women from Guatemala on our crew? Sofia translated both of Sydney's comments into Spanish, only instead of saying "Mexicans" like Sydney did, she said, "personas Mexicanas o Hispanas." Sofia's role as translator went above and beyond translation, sifting out elements of individual speech that could be offensive and just delivering the message at heart. Once she finished translating Sydney's words into Spanish, everyone started speaking over each other

across the picnic table. After a few moments, Gabriela broke through the chaos in English, speaking directly to *las chicas americanas*,

"I see you guys are trying hard, and I don't want hard feelings here. But sometimes you guys are talking and somebody's asking for ties and you—just, pay attention and focus in what we are doing," Gabriela said calmly and directly.

Miranda quickly replied in an obviously frustrated tone, saying that she is focused. She said that sometimes the Spanish-speaking women are "just screaming, Alambres! Alambres [Ties! Ties]" and that she doesn't know what's happening or who is being spoken to. Gabriela replied, "we're talking to everybody."

Gabriela is trying to gently communicate that when we're running out of twist ties in the field, it is a group conversation about how many there are left to do. Whenever people start running out of ties in the field, they start asking around, "*Alambres, alambres*," in a raised voice so that everyone across the field can hear. I'd worked on the crew before, and I was used to the drill. But this season, many a time in the field, *las chicas americanas* would be in a clump talking by themselves and would not hear the call for *más alambres*. By the time someone walked across the entire field to ask them if they had any alambres, with frustration built up inside, sometimes a Spanish-speaking woman would approach a *chica americana* and loudly exclaim, "*Alambres!?*" which would in turn confuse and often trigger the person who wasn't paying attention and was now hearing the message the first time. It was happening like clockwork. Berta jumps in and confirms in Spanish that when people shout out, "*Alambres*," its directed to everyone, to whoever has any twist ties left. Then what's left can be redistributed among people and they can all finish quicker. Sofia translates this into English.

We can see how both Gabriela and Berta are putting significant effort in to tell *las chicas americanas* what frustrates them and that they need to pay better attention. Yet *las chicas americanas* keep responding to this by saying they need more positive communication and don't understand what people want from them, which they attribute both to the language barrier and not receiving feedback. I could see that many of *las chicas americanas* were getting

defensive and not actually hearing what the Latinx women were trying to tell them. But I also understood that they were being trained and managed by someone who did not speak English and who was struggling to navigate her new management position. As the group conversation continued, *las chicas americanas* remained on the defensive. Logan added in that the twist ties are distributed unequally at the start, and that newer people should get more ties so that they can catch up with the experienced people. Bella confirmed this saying that all she wants to do is work, but she can't because she doesn't have any ties. She doesn't fault herself for working slowly. She faults management for not giving her enough twist ties.

Sofia translates Logan and Bella's comments into Spanish and Adela responds. Sofia translates her response back into English and says quite matter-of-factly that,

"they don't believe you guys can do the job and they want to help you to finish the job faster."

Las chicas americanas fell silent. They knew this was true. I was surprised to hear Logan and Bella express frustration at the small amount of ties that they were being given. When I first started on the crew three years before, I was also given very few ties compared to my Latinx coworkers. It was standard practice that each Latinx worker would be given a full pack of thirty ties, whereas one pack of thirty would be dispersed by Martina between three or four of *las chicas americanas*. But I never complained that I received fewer ties. Over time, I picked up speed and was able to carry my weight almost equally with the professional pickers. As I proved myself, I was given more ties, and these *chicas americanas* had yet to undergo that process.

But there is a real double standard here, because new Latinx women on the crew were not cut the same slack as *las chicas americanas*. New Latinx women on the crew were given the full pack of thirty ties and were expected to pick up their speed on par with the experienced harvesters rather immediately, even when they had no prior farming experience. There was much less space for a learning curve. At this point in the season, many of *las chicas americanas* had been working for over a month and were still functioning at a much slower pace than their Latinx coworkers. Gabriela and Adela seem to take it as fact that *las chicas americanas* will not

ever harvest quickly, and just want *las chicas americanas* to pay attention so that they can come take their unfinished ties and get the job done themselves.

Sofia jumps in and astutely sums up the situation, saying that she sees a common thread among everyone regarding the way that people ask for things and the way that people receive things when they are reprimanded. She translated her own message into Spanish, just before Helen announced to the full group that it was time to wrap up. The ten minutes of group communication was supposed to be coming to an end, but the women's crew had only just gotten started.

Las chicas americanas continued to speak. But this time it was softer, still flavored with defensiveness, but seemingly laden with guilt. One spoke specifically to how impossible it is to communicate fluidly, largely because they don't know Spanish. Another spoke about how sometimes they know that someone is trying to communicate something to them, but they just don't understand what it is they're supposed to do purely because of the language barrier. A third concluded that it's "really hard to learn and to communicate" and that everyone has to really try to make it all work. I wondered if she said this to her fellow *chicas americanas*, or if she meant to imply that her Spanish-speaking coworkers could be trying harder to communicate better.

Despite how much awareness was being directed at issues between *las chicas americanas* and the Spanish-speaking Latinx women, as I said before there were also many issues to be addressed among the Latinx women, which *las chicas americanas* didn't seem to register. As Sydney, Miranda, and Rhonda were all speaking in English, Gabriela and Adela were both speaking in Spanish about something else entirely. Caught between multiple conversations in multiple languages, Sofia translated some of Gabriela and Adela's comments into English. They had been talking about the power dynamics between Martina and Gabriela, and Sofia explained that some of the Spanish-speaking women on the crew wanted it to be known that when they want to communicate with English-speakers about an issue they have with them, they go to Gabriela even though she isn't the boss, because Gabriela can speak better English than

Martina can. Sofia concluded, "It's not that they want to make less of Martina or anyone else, it's because she has English skills."

Martina had been silent throughout our entire meeting. There had been a lot of tension between her and Gabriela throughout the season already. Martina was supposed to be the authority on the women's crew, but she did not have the English skills to communicate with *las chicas americanas* and Gabriela did. In my opinion, Martina is an excellent manager and does a great job training English-speakers and maintaining their quality control despite the language barrier. Regardless, often times when Spanish-speaking women would go to Gabriela instead. And often times the information that Gabriela would give would contradict what Martina had told them to do. *Las chicas americanas* were often incredibly confused in the field, and largely unaware of the underlying power dynamic occurring between Martina and Gabriela in Spanish.

Helen and Nancy were officially bringing our individual group meetings to a close, and our time to talk with each other was over. Now it was time for each group to send a representative up to the front to discuss what their group came up with. The packing shed went first, and Gabriela and Logan continued to whisper in Spanglish about how to write everything down on our bullet-pointed list. By the time Helen asked for the next sharer to come up, Logan was still writing and said, "We need more time!" as she flicked up the giant paper off the table and ran with it up to the front.

She secured the paper to the board and the packing shed of farmers fell silent as she began to read out our list. Pausing every other sentence to allow Sofia to translate, Logan brought up the first three points the group had brought up. These were, the need for a single central announcement in both English and Spanish at each field transition, the need for equity in work performance so that everyone is pulling their own weight, and the need to communicate feedback and reminders in a positive way on both the giving and receiving end. Nancy paused and asked Logan to give an example of something someone might actually say. She did. Gabriela spoke up and added that sometimes they're just in a rush because they're trying to beat the heat and finish the harvest before the produce starts wilting. I felt that perhaps

Gabriela meant to justify not giving feedback in a positive way because all that mattered was getting the job done well. She was known by all on the crew as the grumpy, serious one.

Logan continued to work her way down the bullet-pointed list, hitting on many of the important points that some of the Latinx women had wanted voiced, but also largely focusing on the quality of communication needing to be more polite and encouraging than critical. Time and time again, we see how las chicas americanas are vocalizing how they value emotionally supportive communication and are most worried about that, whereas many of the Latinx women vocalize that they are primarily concerned with getting the job done quickly and well. It's not that everyone doesn't value both quality of work and good communication, but some seem to be preoccupied more with one or the other.

Logan ends with one last point that the crew could use more motivation and encouragement. Gabriela replies, this time in Spanish, and Sofia translates her comment back into English. She confirms once again that they just "really want to finish."

Logan finishes and sits back down with a giant exhale, and Kevin replaces her to discuss what's going well and what could be done better on the men's crew. He speaks to both issues of authority and issues around the language barrier that are affecting communication on their crew as well. To give a little background, similar to Martina, Serapio, the men's crew leader was also in his first management role on the farm. His son had just moved here from Mexico and had started to work at the farm, and many of the Latinx men on the crew were frustrated both with his lack of work ethic and with Serapio's inaction to enforce a better work ethic on him. Kevin is the same age as Serapio's son, so many of the men on the crew would confide in him their concerns so that perhaps Kevin could try to convince the guy to pick up the pace despite his nepotism, since it didn't seem that Serapio would do anything. Kevin spoke to this, saying,

"There are days where some of the workers maybe aren't working at their fullest of capabilities, it seems like. And it would be nice if people with authority could recognize it in a loving way... because if we say it amongst ourselves, it's great. But at the end of the day there is a hierarchy of authority..."

Here, Kevin speaks to the functionality of hierarchy on the crew, that workers themselves can notice a disparity in work performance amongst each other, but that they feel a manager is necessary to enforce parity of work performance. The manager of the men's crew was new to managing people just as Martina was. He seems to acknowledge that some people are uncomfortable with hierarchy, but that it nonetheless serves a purpose. He continues, speaking to issues in communication similar to those voiced on the women's crew.

"And another issue that we have is obviously the language barrier... We came to the conclusion that there are a lot of times that we are trying to correct each other and help each other out, but because of the language barrier, and because sometimes of the tone that we use—number one, you're catching sixty to fifty to forty percent of what the person is saying to you. You're already sort of confused and might be a little flustered, and then on top of that, if someone's saying it in a not so nice tone, maybe a little nasty tone, it just doubles up on the amount of internal frustration and sometimes it can boil over in workers. We definitely need to make sure to make it a priority to get someone to translate then and there."

After Kevin finishes going through the men's crew's list, it was the office crew's turn. As they were speaking, Miranda turned to me and whispered that she wanted to apologize for how defensive she got during our group conversation. The other farm crews took their turns going up and sharing, and Helen, Nancy, and Sofia wrapped up the meeting. Helen ended by saying that she encourages everyone to continue working on open communication, that it doesn't need to be as formal as the communication workshop, but that we should all feel open to having an ongoing conversation about what is going well and what we could do better. She emphasized that such conversation can feel uncomfortable and might even "make you feel a little defensive." For this reason, it's important to remember to communicate respectfully, and that it's not just about what you say but about the way that you say it.

Sofia jumped in and asked if she could give an example. She spoke in Spanish describing how there is a big difference between saying 'dame alambres' in Spanish and the exact translation in English, "give me ties." In Spanish, it's normal to just say, "dame alambres," and isn't

considered rude or abrasive, but in English, if someone were to say, “give me ties,” it comes across as rude and inconsiderate unless worded differently, such as saying “could I have ties.” She transitions to speaking in English and says, “I tell them that, Hispanics, we have this characteristic that we put a lot of emphasis in what we're saying, and sometimes that emphasis doesn't exactly translate.” Jim and Nancy wrapped the event up, everyone got up and put their plates and cups in the dish bins, got back into trucks, and returned to the field to complete the day's harvest.

I didn't know what to make of Sofia's last example. I found it profoundly interesting, that yes, there is a grand difference between the two languages in that particular instance. But it seemed like Spanish-speakers were being blamed for not communicating nicely, and that felt wrong to me. Should it be *las chicas americanas* who should be changing their behavior to be more respectful? I watched as my fellow *chicas* got defensive and took feedback poorly on the regular, seeming to not understand their privilege. Isn't that the bigger problem? But on the other hand, a positive work environment is extremely valuable. Was a harsher environment being promoted by workers themselves because for years they have been conditioned to believe that this is how work has to be? Are *las chicas* promoting a good change by asking for more positive communication, or are they flexing their privilege in an inappropriate way?

There's so much to be unpacked from this communication workshop, too much for my single perspective to decipher. I want to take a moment to remember again my problematic positionality. On the one hand, I do have unique insights on this situation. I have seven years of Spanish courses under my belt, a white bilingual mother who was a preschool teacher and social worker for low-income families who were predominately Latinx, and six years working at the farm and speaking Spanish with many of the Latinx women who are still on the crew today.

I worked on the crew when the foreman was in power. I was nineteen and experienced being new on the crew and being his favorite for a while. I got to go off and harvest radicchio for salad mix—a particularly chill job that consists of squatting down and quickly ripping heads of chicory into bite-sized pieces for salad mix— with just him and Martina, his other favorite at the time, while everyone else stayed back to harvest the massive quantities of lettuce and mustard

greens for the mix. I learned how to harvest quickly because he would challenge me to races all the time. I learned how to rapidly remove the thin skins off of scallions and bunch them at light speed because he made me race him constantly, telling me that I would never win because he was faster than everyone.

He was constantly telling me how he was better than everyone at everything, and he honestly was the fastest, but he would also compliment me constantly, saying that I learned quicker than all the others. I don't want to admit how good I felt when he gave me positive feedback, or how bad I felt when he reprimanded me, like the day I stalled a truck full of carrots one time and he banned me from ever getting in a vehicle at the farm again. Despite the fact that he didn't actually have the power to do that, I didn't drive another vehicle at the farm for over a year.

By the time 2018 came around and *las chicas americanas nuevas* were struggling to make five bunches for an experienced harvester's thirty, I worked a lot more like my Latinx coworkers than I did my fellow *chicas americanas*, because I was an experienced harvester now too, and because I was trained under similar oppressive conditions as many of them were. Of course, my personal experience pales in comparison to those who have a fraction of the agency of what I inherently possess as a white woman. I experienced a fraction of what life on the crew was like before 2018, but I was there, and that experience affects my read on the workshop greatly.

When I heard my Latinx coworkers repeatedly voice how their primary concern was getting the job done quicker, all I thought about was how intense of a harvest crew experience they were used to that many of *las chicas americanas* working their first farm jobs knew nothing about. Out in the field, some of my Latinx coworkers would come to me and Genesis, the bilingual members of the crew, and confide in us about issues they were having with *las chicas americanas* not working fast enough and talking too much, and we would go tell our US-born friends that we all needed to pick up the pace, or that our chard bunches were too big and we needed to re-do them, or that we needed to move to another part of the field where the harvest was bigger. There were many reasons why I wasn't just any *chica americana*.

But with that being said, I am of course rife with blind spots, because I am a *chica americana*. I am nowhere near fluent in Spanish, and I misunderstand what people say to me all the time. Moreover, a lot is never said to me, and there are entire social levels among my Spanish-speaking coworkers that I have never even caught a glimpse of. The complexity of the situation could never be known by someone like me, and I too am just learning how to navigate the radical fault lines in our local food systems, learning about how racism is embedded within me.

When I was at the communication workshop, I remember feeling wholly skeptical of the entire thing. Like I said before, I was wary of the workshop being led by two white women in management. When it came time within the women's crew to decide who would write our points down on the butcher paper, Logan looked to me to do it, but I declined. I didn't feel comfortable representing the group as a white woman because of my blind spots. But none of my Latinx coworkers seemed to want to take the pen, so Logan assumed the responsibility. She was assisted by Gabriela, who had more English skills than any of the other Latinx women, so that she could write the points down in both English and Spanish.

I'm wary of the entire meeting's emphasis on more positive, encouraging communication. I am very aware of when other people are working faster than I am and I tend to destroy my body to catch up with them as fast as possible. So, I don't empathize with my fellow *chicas americanas* in not knowing that I should go faster because no one told me. No one should have to tell you. It is extremely unfair that the Latinx women are held to a higher standard than *las chicas americanas*. Framing the problem as needing to communicate critiques more gently seems like it puts all the work on the Latinx women's shoulders, promoting the notion that the Latinx women should tone themselves down on behalf of white women. This is all very problematic.

And yet, despite however way the workshop was framed, the farm did provide paid space and incentive for people to speak candidly with each other. The owners ceased nearly all actual farming tasks for nearly the entire season to devote time to listen and hear the needs and concerns of employees who previously had no voice. The Latinx women were able to voice many of their concerns openly and be heard at the workshop, even if I felt like my fellow *chicas americanas* could have done a better job listening, and even if it was only over lunch. It was a

first step. Reading back through my transcription, I can't help but notice that I feel far less critical of the workshop and surprisingly impressed by how radical an experience it was.

What did this communication workshop rate on the radicalization meter? Was this exemplary of what a farm could do to start incorporating worker voices and concerns? Did it address structural issues of race-based inequalities? Or did its good intentions wane too problematic? Before we can really answer those questions, we have to understand what happened after.

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Radical Ripples

Four decisions were made by management based on the communication workshop and employee interviews—for better and for worse. These decisions resulted in the cilantro time trials, a new bilingual-buddy system, the decision to remove Gabriela from the field crew to avoid further power struggles between her and Martina, and finally, a series of employee reviews for the entire field crew.

The morning after the workshop at the morning meeting, Nancy announced that the farm would be holding a time trial on Saturday where each field crew member would be given thirty twist ties and be timed to see how long it took. We were informed that management would then be able to see what the average harvest rate should be, and if folks were well below that average then perhaps they would be moved to another crew where they might do better. Chaos ensued that Saturday in the cilantro patch. The farm was in uproar, and the experiment went nowhere.

The following Monday at the morning meeting, Nancy announced that there would be a new bilingual-buddy system on both harvest crews. Each crew was divided into smaller groups of three, each consisting of one Spanish-speaker, one English-speaker, and one bilingual person.

After the meeting, people didn't take the groups too seriously, but we adhered to them a bit. And the groups did work to integrate people and aid in communication. In general, *las chicas americanas* became a bit more aware of themselves and increasing their harvest speed, and people were communicating more with each other across the language barrier.

Not everyone could keep up with the pace though. That week we were picking boysenberries when my Spanish-speaking buddy, Carolina, came up to me. She darted her eyes over to Sydney, who was leisurely picking berries with one hand while holding her flat against her body with the other. Carolina told me that she was really frustrated that Sydney was not pulling her weight, so I told her that I would say something. I went walked over to Sydney and said something to the extent of, "Hey, Sydney. I just wanted to let you know that it's general harvest practice to pick with both hands and keep your flat on the ground. I know it might not seem faster, but it definitely makes a difference." Without looking up, Sydney calmly replied with these exact words, "Yeah, but I don't really think that's applicable in this situation."

I looked around at the ten other women picking with both hands with their flats on the ground, all more than three times as full as Sydney's flat, and I didn't know what else to say. I walked back to where I left my flat with a puzzled look on my face and Carolina immediately asked, "*Qué dijo?*" [What did she say?] "*Ella dijo que ella está piscando bien. Yo no sé, Carolina. Yo puedo hablar inglés y todavía no sirve,*" [She said that she's picking just fine. I don't know, Carolina. I can speak English and even that doesn't work,] I replied. Carolina laughed and we continued leap-frogging our way down the row. Sydney quit later that day.

The following Friday, the M Crew was finalized with a surprise twist. The M crew, which goes by many names but is most commonly understood as the miscellaneous crew, was created a few years ago because the harvest crew was getting too big and certain tasks needed to be delegated to another crew. Historically, the crew had consisted solely of white, US-born employees. Now the crew leader was a man from Malawi, but Latinx workers never worked on the M Crew, until now. This Friday, Nancy announced that Gabriela would be removed from the field crew and moved to the M Crew. Some of the Latinx women didn't think that this was right and would tell me so as we worked in the field. It was never clear to me whether or not this

was something that Gabriela wanted or not, and she was not forthcoming to tell me either way. But either way, Gabriela ended up back on the crew in a matter of weeks, ended up quitting the season early and working at a nursery over the winter, and coming back to the crew in 2019.

The following week, I became particularly aware of the challenges faced by Martina as a manager. On Tuesday, Genesis was out sick and I became Martina's righthand, assisting in translating at every field transition and translating for Martina to assure quality of harvest. In my field notes, I recollected on how challenging the experience was for me, let alone Martina.

"Interesting emotional toll as the translator that I felt for the first time without Genesis there. Partially due to the strain of constantly listening, speaking and thinking in two languages, one of which I am not fluent in. Also, it is taxing because the communication that the translator is responsible for is actually really important regarding how much we are able to get done in a day, the quality of our products, and the emotional experience of the employees who have to be given criticisms across languages and cultures... Bella pushed back a little to my translating. Earlier she had brought the wrong vehicle, which I knew because Martina expressed it outwardly with a sigh when she saw her pull up, but Bella was not told that she made this mistake. Later in a field transition Martina asked me to help make sure Bella got the message on how many totes and of what kind she needed to bring back. With all three of us standing there after Martina said what she needed in Spanish, I started translating and Bella cut me off, saying, "I can talk to Martina by myself, I don't need you to translate." I said, "okay," and she drove away. Martina looked concerned and asked me what Bella had said, and I told her that Bella was angry because she thought she didn't need help translating. But I told Martina, "está bien," [it's fine] and she said "Gracias, Laura."

I still need help translating, and I still bring the wrong truck sometimes, so I found it interesting that Bella denied the extra assistance. But that's beside the point. Martina was flustered that day. I don't know if something else was going on, but it seemed to me that she felt uncomfortable without Genesis there to support her. Later in the day we were harvesting heads of chicory and Serapio was there randomly. He would often join the women if there was

random tractor-work to be done. With Serapio looking over her shoulder, Martina was pressuring everyone to work faster, yelling repeatedly, “*Más rápido, chicas! Más rápido!*” The Latinx women visibly and silently picked up the pace, while *las chicas americanas* were fumbling around trying to move faster and laughing out loud. Logan laughed and said, “*más tranquilo, Martina!*” Normally Martina would have jested back, but today was no laughing matter.

It was a particularly hot day and we needed to finish the harvest faster than usual. Our final harvest of the wiltables before we moved onto the heat-loving crops (tomatoes, peppers, eggplant) was basil. Sweating it up in the basil house, Bella took the first truck-load of basil totes to the packing shed and returned with more totes, and bad news:

“Bella said that when she drove the basil back to the barn Nancy was really frustrated at how wilted the basil was. Martina started moving frantically and said out loud in Spanish “Necesitamos mover más rápido, hace calor y el albaca está quemando.” I said in English, “Martina says we should try to go faster because it’s getting too hot out and the basil is wilting.” I increased my pace and worked a few minutes when I noticed that Martina had placed the full tubs of basil that are normally set aside in the shade were sitting in direct sunlight. I pointed at them and said to Martina, “Martina, están directamente en el sol, ¿debemos moverlos?” She quickly replied without looking up, “no, vamos a terminar en unos minutos,” as she continued to frantically pick.”

This wasn’t normal behavior for Martina. Martina is not a worry-wort, and she is often the first to make a joke and make everyone laugh. She and Logan specifically joke around in Spanglish with each other all day, but today she was in no mood. I was so incredibly exhausted at the end of that day, beyond the eleven hours of working physically in the sun. As I laid in bed at 8:30 pm without the energy to even shower off the dirt, I couldn’t imagine how Martina might be feeling, how utterly exhausted she must be every single day.

The next day Genesis was home sick again, and my employee review got moved up to her time slot. Each employee review was held across the dining table at Jim and Nancy’s house, just a quick walk from the packing shed. I was the employee to be reviewed, Martina was there as my

manager to review me, Sofia was there to aid in translation, and Nancy was there as well. Nancy and Sofia hosted each review together for the women's crew. We had just finished our jalapeño harvest and were transitioning to maintenance harvest on the cukes and zukes when Martina and I broke off to go to the meeting.

I came prepared with my task checklist all filled out. I checked off everything that I had been trained to harvest, leaving a few items blank that I felt I needed increase my speed on. Nancy and Martina glanced at my checklist and then Martina said that she was very happy with my work speed and considers me one of the experienced field crew members specifically since I worked with the field crew with the foreman before, saying, “ella está acostumbrada a trabajar.”

Martina continued to say that she liked that I have experience managing people at market and that it's been really helpful for her learning to manage people on the crew. I surprised myself as Spanish words started flowing out of me so fluidly, and added that at market it's very difficult to balance managing quality control of the physical booth with managing people, and that Martina's position is even more difficult because she's managing the quality of the harvest as well as human beings, only the human beings speak different languages and some don't get along.

Martina continued to say that sometimes someone will come up to her concerned that *una chica americana* was making her bunches too quickly and that she suspected there must be something wrong with them. Martina told the woman that she'd go take a look, and when she did, she saw that the bunches were perfect, and the person was just working at a good pace. She went back and told the woman the bunches looked fine, and Martina said she looked disappointed. Sofia translated Martina's words and said, “she says that sometimes people just have it out for the other person.”

This last comment made me feel uncomfortable. Even if Martina was the one to say it, I rejected empathizing with the sentiment. Her comment reminded me of a conversation Logan had with Martina one day about Gabriela. Language barrier aside, it was clear to see that

Martina and Gabriela had a power struggle. Martina told Logan one day that she thought that the difference between herself and Gabriela was that Gabriela didn't like to teach the new girls, but that Martina loved teaching *las chicas nuevas*. And she did. Of course, I have a great relationship with Gabriela as well, even though she and Martina don't get along, and she's gladly taught me plenty of her harvesting *mañas*. But Martina is definitely right, she has much less patience with *las chicas nuevas*, white or Latinx.

I brought up how some of the Latinx women will come up to me with complaints about the other *chicas americanas* as well, and that I try to aid in communication. I described how I would often see *una chica americana* get corrected by every single person that passes by her in the field and that by the time it happens a fourth time, she ends up responding with frustration, causing further distance between them and the Latinx women. I would constantly remind my fellow *chicas americanas* to just calmly say "gracias," even if they're frustrated and be grateful and respectful of feedback. I wasn't sure if that's what was best, but that's what I did myself.

These issues become further exacerbated when *las chicas americanas* are getting conflicting criticisms from different Latinx women and get corrected back and forth. I gave an example from a few days before where we were pruning tomatoes. We were supposed to remove all the suckers from the branch crotches, and there was debate over how best to do it so as to inhibit the spread of disease. Berta was adamant that we needed to use scissors to get a clean cut, but Gabriela was equally as sure that scissors would spread disease and that we needed to snap the suckers off with our hands while wearing gloves. Stuck in an uncomfortable position, I chose to use scissors and Gabriela scoffed at me.

Nancy jumped in and emphasized that this was a perfect discussion to bring up in our morning meetings, and that she really wanted our meetings to be a space for us to discuss these things and come to a collective conclusion. Martina responded by saying that she felt uncomfortable speaking up in our morning meetings. Nancy asked her why. Martina recalled that at the communication workshop, another Latinx woman, Brigida, had made a comment and everyone laughed at her. I remember that moment, and Brigida had said something funny. Everyone was laughing with her, not at her. But Martina was not laughing, she was scared of speaking up.

Our meeting had gone far over the designated time slot, and Sofia had to go. Nancy and Sofia left to go pack up some vegetables for Sofia to take home, while Martina and I stayed behind to finish the last of the paperwork for my employee review. We joked about not going back to work and instead staying in the owners' house, drinking wine and making dinner, but Martina said Nancy would probably come home and catch us. We walked outside and caught a ride on the back of a truck back into the field.

By the time our five o'clock break came around, the other chicas americanas had gone home and it was just me and the Latinx ladies. For some reason, everyone was spending their break sitting in the suburban with the windows up and it was oppressively hot, so I went against my desire to stay with the team and laid down in the thin shadow of the hoop house and started filling in field notes on my phone. As I added later that night before bed,

"Martina came over almost immediately and laid down in the thin strip of shade right next to me, her body snuggled up aside mine. She thanked me for helping her talk with la patrona in our meeting, whipped her phone out, and started excitedly showing me videos of people dancing in her home town in Guatemala on Facebook. I looked at all the bright colors and the brightness in Martina's eyes and felt like there was nowhere else in the world I'd rather be, no one else who I'd rather be with. I love her. Nonetheless, I checked my phone at 5:15, then at 5:17, and then at 5:18 I told Martina that I guess we should probably go back to work. But she didn't budge. She kept scrolling through her phone, 'Mira, mira! Yo puedo bailar así.'"

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Mis Chicas

Regardless of the language barrier and the difficulties expressed at the communication workshop, in the field Martina did an amazing job teaching *las chicas americanas* how to do everything well. She communicated firmly but gently, and adopted very maternal practices, as did some of the other Latinx women. By the time of our meeting, it was already almost August,

and we weren't the *chicas americanas* anymore. Some of the Latinx women, Martina included, simply referred to us as "*mis chicas*," [my girls]. But to certain Latinx women, we were most definitely still just *las chicas americanas*.

Martina constantly joked about all being family. She would often say that she was the dad and Berta was the mom and that Loganita was her little *bebé*. Logan's real name was Daniela, which was also Martina's daughter's name back in Guatemala. Whenever Logan was talking too much or if Martina just wanted to have fun, she loved to taunt her and call her Daniela. If Logan's bunch was looking a little scraggly, Martina would come over and say, "*pareces nueva, Daniela*." That was one of many inside jokes— "*pareces nueva*," which if translated correctly is a complement, "you look new." But via Logan's broken Spanglish, she used "*pareces nueva*" to mean, "you seem new," like you're calling somebody a newb. Martina picked up on this meaning and used the phrase this way regularly, like, "Your bunch is terrible, Daniela, you seem new. *Pareces nueva*."

Similarly, Berta was extremely maternal toward *las chicas americanas*, always offering us food during field transitions that she had stashed in the suburban and making us all take breaks to drink water when the sun was high. Just as Logan and Martina became particularly close, Berta had become very close with Rhonda. They really loved each other. If Rhonda was ever out sick, Berta would ask about her all day and ask us to text her and see how she was doing. Rhonda had a birthday party later in the season and invited Eva. After work on the night of the party, Logan drove to Berta's apartment to pick her up. With hair down and no sign of farm clothes, Berta was looking fly! Logan said she was worried they were going to be late, but Berta kept saying she needed to make just a few more tortillas, slapping masa together with one hand as she flipped the tortillas on the electric *comál* with the other.

I was already at the party in the backyard amidst a sea of predominately white people when I saw Berta walk hesitantly through the back door of the house with Logan. Kevin and I went up to greet her and dish up some food, and together we walked out into the backyard into the sea of people. I told Berta I didn't know anyone there except for us farm folk either, wrongly

assuming that she was probably anxious. But she leaned over with a big grin on her face and whispered, “*esta es mi primera fiesta americana.*”

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Martina and Logan were two peas in a pod all season long. They were inseparable and loved teaching each other English and Spanish via saying the most ridiculous sentences. Despite the difficulties on the crew and how serious things could be, the majority of our time spent in the field was defined by collective laughter across the board. Even some of the Latinx women who were much less interested in connecting with *las chicas americanas* than Martina and Berta were quite often fully engaged in making fun and joking around. Never underestimate the power of a phallic carrot to cut through language barriers and get everyone laughing.

Six months after the season’s end, Logan was visiting Corvallis and staying with me for a few days. She desperately wanted to visit the women on the field crew, so we went to the farm at snack, loaded up into the suburban, and were right back in the groove within minutes. My partner and I go over to Martina’s house all the time, so I was no exciting news. But Martina was ecstatic to see Logan! We told ourselves we’d only stay for fifteen minutes, but before we knew it, three hours went by and we still didn’t want to go.

Logan dove right back into joking around with Martina and being ridiculous and everyone was laughing. Martina and Berta just kept repeating over and over again, “*te extraño, Loganita. Cuando vas a regresar?*” [I miss you, Loganita. When are you going to come back?] Much to their dismay, Logan got a job managing a pack shed at a farm in Washington with no return in sight. “*Y tú, Laurita? Cuando vas a regresar?*” [And you, Laurita? When are you coming back?] Berta asked. “*Me voy a regresar con ustedes en julio, después de escuela.*” [I’m coming back with y’all in July after school.] “*Bueno,*” [Good] she replied. Logan turned and asked Gabriela, “Gabriela, did you miss me?” Without skipping a beat, Gabriela replied, “No,” but looked up and cracked a tiny smile before looking back down at the spinach she was bunching. Everyone laughed.

Just as Rachel Slocum said in the quote that began this chapter, the mixing of bodies has the potential to “make or unmake hegemony.” In the context of the women’s crew at OOF in 2018, what conclusions can we draw? Through my discussions with *las chicas americanas*, despite the challenges they expressed at the communication workshop, nearly all of them considered this season on the farm as one of the most pivotal in their lives. They expressed feeling such love and admiration for the Latinx women they worked with and loved learning Spanish. During her visit, Logan and I stayed up late reading each other stories from the season from our journals. Logan read a story aloud that was particularly poignant.

“Estás acostumbrada a mucha lechuga,” [you are accustomed to a lot of lettuce] Martina’s voice echoed straight into my soul.

I am accustomed to having a lot.

The fog was hovering densely over the back field where las hierbas [the weeds] were overgrown knee-high. An array of overcut lettuces, chartreuse and maroon and brown-tipped from the frost, hid beneath the uncultivated mess. Martina insisted that we search for every single one and cut off their few remaining nice leaves for the morning’s salad mix.

My fingers felt arthritic and frozen beneath two thick pairs of gloves. Martina wore only thin pale blue nitrile guantes [gloves] over her calloused hands. I continued shuffling through the dew-drenched overgrowth, their soggy leaves drenching my jacket sleeves. A long silence hung between our words, filled only by crunching boots in the frosty soil.

“Pero tenemos una casa verde lleno de lechuga perfecta, Martina!” [but we have a full greenhouse of perfect lettuce, Martina!] I proclaimed with a whiny tone, stopping my seemingly aimless search for lettuce and looking up for some sort of validation. I could barely make out the silhouettes of nuestras compañeras [our coworkers] hundreds of feet away bent over harvesting without complaint.

“Pero necesitamos conservarlas para más tarde en el invierno, Loganita!” [but we need to save those for later in the winter, Loganita!] She replied insistently.

I sighed. She was always like that (and I knew damn well why), but I was growing irritated. We needed a hundred pounds of salad mix and it seemed to be taking hours to cut a single damn leaf from each struggling lettuce head. I craved the warmth of my bed, or at least of a dry greenhouse. I questioned my own sanity out in the frigid November morning, digging through weeds on my hands and knees with a salad knife frozen to my stiff fingers.

Perhaps sensing my increasing frustration and doubt, Martina’s voice burst through the stillness once more: “Vamos Loganita. Voy a enseñarte. Me gusta cuando no hay mucha ensalada. Yo aprendo a pisar más rápido, entonces cuando tenemos mucho en el verano, estoy muy rápido.” [Come on, Loganita. I am going to show you. I like when there’s not very much salad. I learn to harvest faster so when we have a lot in the summertime, I am very fast.]

At that monumental moment, the look on her face melted my heart. Her eyebrow was raised like a mother teaching her child a lesson, yet an emerging grin radiated from the corners of her mouth up her high cheekbones. Martina simultaneously played the roles of a mother, teacher, boss, and friend as she playfully grabbed my hand and swept me down the long row of pigweed and chickweed with tiny crops tucked beneath.

She moved smoothly and efficiently, cutting a single leaf from each plant, tossing it in el bote [the tub], and dropping the podrido [rotten] parts back to la tierra [the soil/ earth].

“Mira Loganita! Mírame!” [watch, Loganita! Watch me!] She instructed in a tone of encouragement and pure sweetness.

It never ceases to amaze me how hard that woman works for so little pay or recognition; how fast she moves regardless of the temperature; how she never utters a single complaint. She says “mi vida... no me importa. Yo trabajo para mis hijos” [My life is not important to me. I work for my children.]

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Obviously, the season meant a lot to many of *las chicas americanas*. Without provocation, many of them spoke of their experiences as life-changing. They chose to work on an organic farm on a crew of migrant workers. But what about the Latinx women? They were not openly saying how much their lives changed working with *las chicas americanas*. They did not choose to work on a crew with *chicas americanas*. And at the end of the season, *las chicas americanas* all went their separate ways, onto new farming endeavors, back to the university, or even just into a higher-paid position at OOF, and a core group of Latinx women remained through the winter.

While trellising tomatoes-to-be early spring 2019, I spoke with some of the Latinx women about their experience last season working with *las chicas americanas*. There were of course mixed reactions, and some confused looks since *yo soy una chica americana*. Despite our familiarity, I am certain I am a very problematic person to be asking such a question, and more forthcoming truths exist unbeknownst to me, but here I am. Some couldn't have cared less— "*trabajo es trabajo*," Gabriela said, [work is work]. Others remembered back fondly on certain times and certain people and said that it was fun, while also remembering back on times where communication was difficult and differences in work parity was frustrating.

But fun and fondness is one thing; freedom is another. Berta's first attendance at an American party was fun, but it wasn't life-changing. Martina's asks after Logan all the time and loves to joke around with her when she visits, but that doesn't change the fact that she still hasn't seen her Daniela in years. Thinking of better questions to be asking as we spoke, the extent to which some of the Latinx women enjoyed or did not enjoy the presence of *chicas americanas* in their workplace was not of concern to anyone but me. It wasn't the question of concern to be asking. What's concerning is that no one asked them in the first place and why.

Management decided to integrate a crew that had largely been segregated for the better part of thirty years. Inherently, working to eliminate racial segregation is good. A mixing of bodies is good. However, nobody asked the migrant workers what they thought about integrating the

crew with *los americanos*. They were still not a part of the conversation. As I brought this up, Berta replied, “*pero si es un cambio bueno, está bien,*” [if it’s a good change, it’s fine]. I replied, “*sí, pero si nadie está preguntando a ustedes si es un cambio bueno o no, entonces cómo saben?*” [yeah, but if no one is asking you all if it’s a good change or not, then how do they know?] “*Cómo saben... Exactamente,*” Berta replied.

Surely there was power and beauty in the mixing of bodies this season, but it has severe limitations. First, the way in which the decision to desegregate was made matters. Do the segregated decide or does management decide? Additionally, the benefits of the mixing of bodies are not distributed equally across racial lines, as *las chicas americanas* gained life-changing experiences but none of the Latinx women vocalized anything beyond enjoying making new friends and joking around in the field. Others vocalized solely frustration at the communication workshop. To some extent, the shifts in consciousness made by *las chicas americanas* seem to have come at a cost that has been subsidized by some of their Latinx crewmembers.

Since the 2018 season, further changes have been made by management to promote worker voices and inclusion in the decision-making process. Latinx crew leaders are now present at all new crewmember interviews and are encouraged and asked to voice concerns and opinions about who ends up on their crew and who does not, but this process is still very much in its early stages of radicalization. Morning meetings have become more interactive in their second season, and workers and crew leaders are vocalizing their concerns and opinions with the group more openly on a regular basis. In addition, mechanisms have been put in place to encourage and facilitate communication between workers and human resources whenever needed.

Of course, these are good changes being made in the right direction, but are they good enough? Are they happening fast enough? Are they radical enough? Or are they just progressive? Farm management is doing their best to try to address inequality on their farm and bring everyone into the conversation; they often devote more hours in the day to addressing worker concerns than they devote to their daily farm tasks. But it’s all an experiment. Nobody knows what to do despite doing their best. At the end of the day, the

intent to radicalize is not the same as radicalization itself. Good intentions, obviously, are no longer enough. Radical changes are not truly radical unless made by those who are most affected by them.

A mixing of bodies alone does not address the bigger structural issues that define the life of the migrant farmworker. A fun time in the field joking around in Spanglish does nothing for the women who endure many years of hard work and even abuse just to feed their families that they don't even know when they will see again. Sitting in my dark car after drinks one night last season with Genesis, my best friend and the Latinx advocate who left the farm following this season, I spoke about how meaningful I thought the season on the crew had been. She just buried her face in her hands and said,

"It doesn't mean anything. Everything has to change."



Conclusion—Beyond Food: A Call to Willamette Valley Locavores

“Radical ecology... acts on a new perception that domination of nature entails the domination of human beings along lines of race, class, and gender... Radical actions often raise public consciousness about issues enmeshed in bureaucratic technicalities. Changes triggered by radical actions may then come about through normal political processes.” (Merchant 2005)

I told you in the beginning that I’d be asking a lot of you, and I am. I am inviting you to hear the critiques of our local food systems and know that they must move outside the academic echo chamber and into our daily lives. I am inviting you to look at yourself and be open to the ways in which you personally reproduce racism and whiteness in your lives. I am inviting you confront shame, move beyond the paralyzing state of not wanting to say or do anything in fear of saying or doing the wrong thing, and to remain open to making the changes being asked of us if only we stopped to ask and listen. I’m inviting you to stop abdicating your agency to consumerism in order to fight for the collective agency of all those in our local food system.

It has been far too long the norm for our local food systems to exist as a utopia for the few whilst doing little to nothing to address the structural problems that affect the masses. Local food systems are only accessible to a small and predominately white and wealthy class. We all know this, but we don’t know what we can do about it. Those of us with the privilege to support local food should, right? Totally right. But consumption can no longer be our only method of making change. From the farmers to the consumers themselves, local food systems are exclusive, despite *intending* to be otherwise, leaving the most marginalized and oppressed people behind, stuck producing and consuming for the industrial capitalist machine that will very well continue unheeded to churn up human and other earthly bodies while locavores proudly enjoy their organic heirloom tomatoes and bike rides to the local farmers market. The limitations of that which we love must be accepted and actively addressed.

It has been far too long the norm to perform local food activism solely as an ethical consumer rather than as an engaged citizen, far too long that the dollar has been seen as our only

weapon. Voting with our dollars is not our only weapon and promoting the idea that it is only serves to promote the fallacy that we the people have no power, that the problems in the world are too big for individual people to change. But we do have power, we can make change, and we are. It's time to acknowledge that alternative food systems, despite their successes that must be celebrated, and despite their necessity in our great journey toward justice, are *alternatives* to traditional and successful ways of making real, structural social change (Alkon and Guthman 2017).

It has been far too long that mainstream environmentalism has limited itself to what it deems to be solely *environmental* issues, rather than seriously aligning with social justice movements. As Eric Holt-Giménez so clearly laid it out for us in *A Foodie's Guide to Capitalism*, our current capitalist food system—and capitalism in general—functions precisely by both devaluing and robbing the wealth from both the environment *and* from *human labor* (Holt-Giménez 2017). Addressing purely *environmental* concerns does not address the second half of this equation.

Our understanding of local food systems has been diminished to the local-industrial dichotomy where industrial is seen as all bad and local is seen as all good. This conflation of local with wholesomeness has been referred to as the local trap, and fallen in we have (Gray 2013; Purcell 2006; Born and Purcell 2006). This polarized way of thought promotes the belief that there is both no need to critically question what is problematic about local food systems, inhibiting the reflexive behavior necessary of a self-critical and dynamic society.

This false dichotomy, combined with a historic exclusion of social justice issues from “environmental” ones, has served to hide the fact that our local food systems largely rely on segregated migrant farmworkers just as their industrial counterparts do. Although the conditions that farmworkers are exposed to are significantly safer on local small farms in terms of toxin exposure, the vulnerable position of migrant farmworkers and the associated dangers differs not. For example, migrant farmworker women are so vulnerable in this country that eighty percent of them have experienced some form of sexual harassment (Human Rights Watch 2012; Rainey 2018). Migrant issues are not a part of local food discourse, largely because the migrant farmworkers are not a part of the conversation.

But the discussion goes beyond the fact that locavores should take action just because there are migrant workers in *their* local food systems. That's the same old logic used to justify opting out of participating in industrial food systems to avoid supporting human exploitation. The crux of the argument does not lie in the fact that local food systems specifically hire migrant labor, because even if our local food systems solved the labor challenge in other ways, the need for cross-class alliances remains the same. The fact that locavores are unaware that their idolized local farms hire migrant labor simply goes to show just how blind locavores have been to social justice concerns in the food system in general. The need remains nonetheless to seriously align mainstream environmentalism with social justice, addressing the historical disparity between the two.

Locavores *actively* value individual health and environmental health, but not labor health, or rather, migrant health. Of course, many locavores would say that they value social justice, but most do not know how to embody that value in an actionable way or why. Sociologist Jon Agnone studied the efficacy of environmentalist tactics in the 20th century and found protest to be the most effective tool "in influencing federal environmental law... Failure to protest robs us of our most important source of power," (Ward 2007).

Ethical consumers already put significant amounts of energy into affecting change with the tools at their disposal, so shifting to utilizing a more radical tool than consumption is really not a hard sell. We aren't talking about convincing Trump supporters to fight for food sovereignty and immigrant rights. We're talking about mobilizing people who really would do better if they knew better. We're talking about people who just need to be primed on how to be aligned.

But of course, it's not that simple. It has been far too long that the race-based inequalities baked into our local food systems have not been recognized, especially in Oregon. But you can't go to a single radicalization training, or a training on uprooting racism and seeding sovereignty, and expect to be changed for life. There are deeply embedded historical paradigms of whiteness and racism within us all and all of our institutions. We must continuously address these issues in the world and within ourselves. Radicalization must be recognized as a process that takes time and personal effort. We will continue to peel off the layers of racialized

paradigms for the rest of our lives. And it's not like you can pay your radical insurance cost six months at a time to save on time and energy. Radicalization is a practice.

Although the complexity of these issues will reach far into the future, it is also true that we must push radicalization forward rapidly right now. The earth and human rights are both seriously at risk with both environmental and social justice issues coming to a head globally. We all know about our big environmental deadline. We have just over a decade to cut carbon emissions to avoid certain environmental catastrophe (Mooney and Dennis 2018; IPCC 2018).

Achieving major structural changes, not just to mitigate, but to actually stop environmental and human exploitation is going to require an incredibly rapid social revolution that demands effective cooperation and communication between people united by the common ground they stand on. We know that all successful major social revolutions have been led by cross-class alliances (Holt-Giménez 2017). Our local food systems have an incredible opportunity to create such alliances between local consumers and the farmworkers who feed them. Rather than wealthy locavores leading the way toward purely environmental goals, a reversal of agency is required where the exploited drive the fight.

But how do we reverse agency in our local food systems? The first and simplest answer is, we don't. Consumers and dominantly white locavores are not the ones to lead the way or have all of the answers in this situation. I am not the voice to be heard. There have been many successful worker-led and consumer-supported food movements that have led to real structural change, often stemming from migrant workers' knowledge of traditional and successful change-making tools from their home countries (Alkon and Guthman 2017).

White locavores often respond to the concept of agency reversal by thinking that many migrant workers are undocumented and are otherwise too vulnerable to lead the fight, so those with more privilege should. I thought this for a time as well along my personal radicalization process. Although vulnerability is a serious factor, this is a false assumption made by the dominant population that likely would not proliferate if migrant workers were a part of the dominant conversation. It's time to stop deciding what should be done and just ask and listen.

But the opportunity to align goes beyond the potential of the producer-consumer relationship. Our local food systems must address their exclusionary nature to align with a much larger consumer base as well. We need as many people as possible fighting together, protesting together, voting together—and exercising elitism just does not cut it, intentionally or not.

Beyond racial exclusion of Black and Indigenous people of color from local food discourse and our local food systems in general, and beyond the socio-economic exclusion of the vast majority of consumers in this country, locavores can employ elitist and divisive practices that can exclude potential allies from participation. As we saw in the fallout of the first radical social media post I made, the various ways in which locavores promote and protect radical thought matters. The ways in which they respond to those who've yet to undergo the same radical shifts in consciousness matters.

The efficacy of the ways in which we communicate on the edge of radicalization matters because hinderances to radicalization must be addressed if we are to actually make structural environmental and social change as rapidly as we need to. We mustn't mistake our problematic allies for our enemies. We have the choice to focus on our differences and cast judgment upon all those who aren't radical. We also have the choice to instead focus on our commonalities in order to join hands and fight for collective sovereignty, even if it requires picking our battles with each other in the moment. As explored in *The Industrial Revolution of Shame*,

"Judgment serves a crucial end, in both private and public life. Abolition, women's suffrage, civil rights, all required many people to assert their judgment that something was wrong and had to change. Yet [judgement can] crowd out our ability to discuss much else... we could use an alternative to judgment... To witness is to ignore as little as possible. Because a judgment so often impairs the ability to notice what doesn't conform with it, the witness chooses for the time being to keep judgment at a distance," (Scibona 2019).

An excellent example of interpersonal judgement set aside for found common ground comes from the 1999 Seattle World Trade Center protests, where thousands of people from incredibly

diversified backgrounds came together organically to fight against global inequity. As one of the protesters commented,

"We all have things in common. It doesn't mean that we're always going to agree on everything, but we cannot allow those little things that we don't agree on to get in the way of the ultimate goal. And the goal is to take back democracy on this planet... When our sisters or brothers think something is wrong, they will get engaged. Sometimes it takes a while to get there. We all have to connect the dots," (Freidberg and Rowley 2011).

But the thing is, some of the "little things" that we disagree on are not so little. How can we not possibly "keep judgement at a distance?" How can we work with people toward a common goal if some of the people on our team offend us and even cause harm in other significant ways? Is it fair to ask people to choose their battles? When does compassionate communication undermine justice and when does it serve to promote justice more effectively?

In *What is Critical Environmental Justice?* David Naguib Pellow critiques environmental justice studies' tendency to focus solely on resolving issues at the state level and "hesitation to see... social relations as fundamental obstacles to achieving environmental justice," (Pellow 2018, p 151). Figuring out how to communicate and work together collectively is essential to achieving the grand radical changes needed. With the recent rise of marginalized voices and their allies demanding a new daily practice of revolution from us all, I'm not saying that anyone should to tone themselves down in any way. I'm saying that the challenges that lie before us require us to stand on common ground, that we must find it, and that we must collaborate effectively once there. As Vandana Shiva reflected,

"I think the beautiful thing about it was there was no mastermind. What there was was an invitation to join hands. And the joining of hands happened because everyone knew, you have to hold your hands and hold each other's' hands, otherwise we're not going to make a difference. Each of us is too tiny. Each of us is only addressing a tiny piece of this giant problem. And until we join hands we're not even going to start to begin to address it. But if we join hands, we can totally surround it... We are about the same issues, but we are not about

identical issues. The rubric is the same. The umbrella is the same. But within each of our movements we can shape and articulate our freedom, while just being fully aware of other people," (Freidberg and Rowley 2011).

Recognizing the emotional work required of radicalization will be essential to promoting radical thought at the speed which we need it to spread throughout society. With immigration in the national spotlight, human rights being actively ignored, environmental chaos ensuing, and a growing consumer base of local farming systems, great alliances have the potential to stand up to political power and push for real, strong, structural change. Inequity can become endangered when we take each other's hands and fight with effective tools. Individuals have so much power if only it is wielded properly and built on common ground.

Locavores are an untapped army that can better support radical change with radical action. Who knows whether or not we will win the battle but fight we must. It's easy to feel hopeless and easy to feel hopeful, but it's hard to actively fight for the change we hope can happen. Rather than falling into either trap of being passively hopeful or ineffectively depressed, we can start to figure out how to actively, creatively, and collectively promote real change. As the author of *Mobilizing the Green Imagination* states, "we are at a turning point, not a dead end," (Weston 2012).

I see the work cut out for us in the context of *The Great Turning* described by Joanna Macy that is well under way and far from finished. The transition is seen as the third major societal shift in human history, precluded by the agricultural revolution and the industrial revolution. The Great Turning is defined as the shift away from an "Industrial Growth Society to a life-sustaining civilization," and is comprised of three dimensions—actions that slow the damage to Earth and its beings, analysis of structural causes and the creation of structural alternatives, and major shifts in consciousness (Macy 2009). As ecophilosopher and mother of the Environmental Arts and Humanities program that allows me to do this work said,

"Hope is... a vision of something better that keeps us climbing. But it is not a delusion. It is radical imagining, a courageous affirmation of what a person values too much to let die..."

Macy calls this vision active hope... a kind of process thinking, a movie that changes from frame to frame to create change over time,” (Moore 2017, p 314).

This work around migrant labor and the fault lines of our local food systems that they expose is not just about the agency of marginalized groups. In my most grandiose of moods, I believe it is one of the crucial next steps toward our collective sovereignty and a life-sustaining civilization. Ethical consumerism is essential to the health of our local food systems, but the power to create radical, structural change is far more effective and we already collectively own it. As Vandana Shiva continues,

“No labor movement will really be strong and sustainable until it includes the environmental concern, and no environmental movement will have a relevance for the future unless it brings into the equation—how do people live? How do they survive?” (Freidberg and Rowley 2011)

To take back democracy on this planet, to demand global equity, to end environmental exploitation, to end human exploitation—these are big challenges to tackle. Big is not a big enough word to describe it. Like the size of the sun, the scope of these challenges is beyond our ability to even conceptualize. But I feel that our local food systems are the perfect front from which to fight, the perfect platform for cross-class alliances to form to fight the neoliberal capitalist powers that be. As Raj Patel explores in *The History of the World in Seven Cheap Things*,

“Although capitalism is often associated with coal- and oil-fueled revolutions, transformations in the food system came first. Without food surplus, there’s no work outside agriculture... Capitalist agriculture transformed the planet... With climate change, that food system will break in the coming century,” (Patel and Moore 2017, p 140, 160).

We are in a crisis of inseparably intertwined environmental and human exploitation. Radicalization is required of us as a human collective. Action is required of us far beyond voting with our dollars. We must learn from each other and teach each other how to be engaged citizens. This “must be a culture-wide initiative, not another program to be left to a few on the

fringes,” (Weston 2012). The time has come for the mainstream to get radical, to get to the root of exploitation. This started with food. Perhaps it can end with it. The invitation stands.



Appendices

Amazon Best Seller Ranking as of April 2019 (Amazon 2019f, 2019e, 2019c, 2019d, 2019a, 2019b)

Year	Book	Author	Ranking
2004	Agrarian Dreams: The Paradox of Organic Farming in California	Julie Guthman	811,413
2006	The Omnivore's Dilemma: A Natural History of Four Meals	Michael Pollan	4,812
2013	Fresh Fruit, Broken Bodies: Migrant Farmworkers in the United States	Seth Holmes	30,332
2013	Labor and the Locavore: The Making of a Comprehensive Food Ethic	Margaret Gray	809,129
2017	A New Food Activism	Julie Guthman & Alison Hope Alkon	675,362
2017	A Foodie's Guide to Capitalism	Eric Holt-Giménez	451,508

OOF Social Media Post Insights for the year of 2018

Date	Post	FB Reach (AVG 2,583)	FB Engagement: Reactions, Comments, Shares (AVG 118)	FB Shares/ Comments	Instagram, by Engagement	Instagram, by Likes	Instagram, by # Comments
May 26 th	Luda!	NA	NA	NA	#6	#7	#1
July 5 th	Fourth of July	2.9K	275	11/6	#2	#2	#7
Sept 4 th	Como una Flor	904	11	0/0	#16	#15	NA
Oct 6 th	Mud Brick Boots	2.3K	154	4/6	#17	#17	#8
Oct 27 th	Measure 105	4.5K	332	29/35	#12	#14	#15
Dec 1 st	Hands that Harvest	NA	NA	NA	#4	#3	#2

Portland Farmers Market Stats—as of April 2019

Link: in order of Google Search for “Top farmers markets in United States”	Rating
https://parade.com/683329/ameliasaltsman/the-top-25-farmers-markets-across-america/#gallery_683329-4	#4 of 25 in US in 2018
https://www.thedailymeal.com/cook/101-best-farmers-markets-america-2017	#2 of 101 in US in 2017
https://www.shape.com/lifestyle/fit-getaways/best-farmers-markets-us	#7 of 11 in US in 2018
https://www.departures.com/travel/best-farmers-markets-usa#intro	#3 of 11 in US in 2018
https://www.fodors.com/news/restaurants/americas-15-best-farmers-markets	#1 of 15 in US in 2014
https://www.theonlinefarmersmarket.com/blog/5-best-farmers-markets-in-the-us	Not on list of top 5 in 2019
https://www.bonappetit.com/gallery/farmers-markets-worth-traveling-for	Not on list of top 13 in 2017
https://www.usatoday.com/story/travel/experience/food-and-wine/2018/05/11/farmers-markets-each-state/595222002/	Alphabetical by state, PSU market as Oregon’s #1
https://www.tasteofhome.com/collection/best-farmers-markets/	Alphabetical by state, PSU market as Oregon’s #1

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