Food, Space and the City: Theorizing the Free Spaces of FoodShare's Good Food Markets

Michael Classens
Faculty of Environmental Studies
York University

Abstract

This paper explores a social and spatial (socio-spatial) response to urban food insecurity in Toronto, Ontario as expressed through FoodShare's Good Food Market (GFM) program. I argue that the GFMs draw on a multi-scalar conception of urban food insecurity to inform a strategy of resistance to the globalized food system and as a means of reducing food insecurity in Toronto. In as much as the GFM markets are relatively fixed places of resistance to the globalized and industrialized food system, I argue they can be more broadly theorized within the free space literature, a product of the confluence of social movement and critical human geography scholarship. Situating the GFM markets within this hybrid theoretical context illuminates strengths and raises cautions of employing place-based scalar strategies in the context of urban food activism.

Keywords: urban food activism, spatial politics, food inequality, FoodShare

Résumé

Ce document explore un sociales et spatiales (socio-spatiale) en réponse à l'insécurité alimentaire urbaine de Toronto, en Ontario, exprimée par le biais de FoodShare bon marché alimentaire programme (GFM). Je soutiens que le GFMs dessiner sur un multi-scalaire conception de l'insécurité alimentaire urbaine d'informer une stratégie de résistance à la mondialisation du système alimentaire et comme un moyen de réduire l'insécurité alimentaire à Toronto. En autant que les GFM marchés sont relativement fixes lieux de résistance à la mondialisation et les pays industrialisés système alimentaire, je soutiens qu'ils peuvent être plus largement théoriques au sein de l'espace libre la littérature, un produit de la confluence du mouvement social et critique la géographie humaine bourse. Situer le GFM marchés dans cet hybride contexte théorique s'allume atouts et soulève les mises en garde de l'emploi axée sur l'endroit et scalaire stratégie dans le contexte de l'alimentation urbaine activisme.

Mots clés: alimentaire en milieu urbain, activisme spatial la politique, alimentaire inégalité, FoodShare

As I write, news headlines gesture at the increasing intensity of the growing food crisis. The Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) of the United Nations (2014) recently reported that, in the midst of a confluence of socio-political and ecological forces, its Food Price Index—an aggregate of global food commodity prices—remained close to the record levels set in 2011, numbers which had not been seen since the index was introduced in January 1990. The reasons for the spike in food prices are multiple, and seemingly permanent—socio-political upheaval in many parts of the world (especially, currently, in the Middle East and eastern Europe); the rising cost of crude oil, and so, a host of related agricultural inputs including petrol and fertilizers which impact the cost of both farming and transportation; and an agro-capitalist imperative which, in the worst case is rapidly destroying farm land, and in the best case is simply reproducing social and ecological inequality. In Canada, consumers are being warned to brace for yet another increase in the cost of food, this time due to the unprecedented drought occurring in California currently (Davison 2014).

Of course, for many Canadians and others in the Global North, the 'food crisis' is nothing new. A recent report found that 4 million Canadians, or nearly 13% of the population experienced food insecurity in 2012 (Tarasuk, Mitchell and Dachner 2014). An earlier study by the Food Banks of Canada (2010, 2) reports that 867, 948 Canadians visited food banks in March of 2010, a 9% increase over March 2009 and the highest level of food bank use on record. In Toronto, there were nearly 1.2 million visits to food banks in 2012, an 18% increase in usage since the pre-recession period in 2008 (Daily Bread Food Bank 2012). While these numbers serve as a powerful indictment of the contemporary food system, focusing exclusively on the aggregate statistics risks obscuring the biophysical suffering of the individuals and families who struggle daily with hunger.

However, hunger and food insecurity are more than only biophysical processes reducible to simple calculations of caloric intake versus energy expended at either

an aggregate or individual level. Rather, hunger and food insecurity exist within particular social, economic, political, natural and spatial contexts—part of a broader political economic context in which the conditions of hunger and food insecurity are continually reproduced. Precarious housing, unemployment, low income, and a host of other continually reproduced measures of marginalization render food scarce for many. Put simply, one cannot access what one cannot afford in contemporary capitalist society. However, the spatial logic of urbanization has erected yet another barrier to those struggling to access food—one which reveals a particularly spatial character to hunger. The reconfiguration of urban spaces ushered in as part of the neoliberal project (Hackworth 2007) has, in other words, revealed a topography of food insecurity. In their most acute manifestation, the resulting pathologies present as food deserts (Wrigley et al. 2003), depriving residents of particular neighbourhoods access to viable sources of food, or food swamps[1], depriving residents of access to healthy food (Fielding and Simon 2011; Health Canada 2013). The reconfigured urban landscape, therefore, has led also to a reconfigured urban foodscape, effectively severing some residents from the mainstream food system of supermarkets and grocery stores, demonstrating the urban socio-spatial inequalities of the contemporary food system.

Clearly food insecurity and hunger of all spatial configurations are urgent issues. However, I concern myself here with the particular urban character of the matter within the context of the Global North, which remains an under-theorized terrain in need of further and refined insight (Heynen 2005) (See also McClintock 2010, 2013 and Sbicca 2013 for recent stellar work though). More specifically, I endeavor to theorize a particular socio-spatial response to food insecurity in Toronto as expressed through FoodShare's Good Food Markets (GFMs). I argue that the GFMs draw on particular socio-scalar tropes to inform a strategy of both resistance to the globalized food system and to serve as a means of reducing food insecurity in Toronto. In as much as the GFMs are relatively *fixed places* of resistance to the globalized and industrialized food system—that is, they occur in bricks and mortar locations according to a regular, usually weekly, schedule—I argue they can be more broadly theorized within the free space (Evans et al. 1986) literature coming out of the confluence of social movement and critical human geography scholarship. Situating the GFM markets within this hybrid theoretical context illuminates strengths and raises cautions of employing place-based scalar strategy in the context of urban food activism.

The empirical basis for this essay comes from my involvement in a multi-year study of the GFM program (Sumner et al. 2014; Classens et al. forthcoming). My observations about the markets are drawn from many site visits while working as a research assistant, and subsequently lead researcher, between 2010 and 2014, on an extended case study of the GFMs as part of a broader project on social business and marginalized social groups (see http://socialeconomycentre.ca/business-done-differently). During this same period I designed and taught courses on social movement theory and food and social change, through which I became exposed to a broad body of research at the intersection of social movement theory and critical geography. The theoretical framework for this essay is formed by a review of this spatially inflected social movement theory in general, and a more detailed review of what is generically labeled 'free space' literature, in particular.

I begin with a brief history of the context in which FoodShare, and subsequently, the Good Food Markets emerged, highlighting the structural economic shifts of the historical moment of their creation. I then turn to a brief review of the urban foodscape—specifically addressing how the contemporary food system creates uneven distribution of food to urban areas—for the purposes of situating the GFMs within their broader context. I also discuss the corollary to the mainstream food system, the so-called alternative food system(s) and review the literature dealing with the tangled issues of what makes an 'alternative' food system 'alternative' in the first place. Next, I turn towards a discussion of the free space literature and trace various debates and illuminations within that body of work, while pointing out how the empirical case of the GFMs align with and diverge from free space scholarship. Finally, and by way of conclusion, I reflect on the socio-spatial strategy of the GFMs within the context of the free space literature.

Urban restructuring, FoodShare, and the Good Food Markets

Launched in the fall of 1985, with a grant from Metro Toronto for $20,000 and a three-month mandate to coordinate the burgeoning food bank system in Toronto, FoodShare has not only grown into a multi-million dollar organization, but also has become a key presence in the alternative food politics realm of the city (for more on various aspects of FoodShare, see Classens et al. forthcoming, Johnston 2007, Sumner et al. 2013). Parsing together an exhaustive history of the organization is not necessary, however a broad brushstroke historical summary of the confluence of conditions that resulted in the original formation and subsequent direction of the organization is both worthwhile and instructive. Following this brief and selected history, I situate the GFM program within the broader and shifting mandate of FoodShare. I then turn to a brief discussion situating the GFM program within an alternative food network politics.

Though easily conceived of as timeless institutions to many Canadians, the first food bank in Canada opened its doors only 30 years ago, in Winnipeg in 1981. Hunger certainly was a problem in Canada before the early 1980s; however, it is instructive to consider the rapid rise of food bank infrastructure originating during that particular historical moment within the context of significant political and economic restructuring occurring during the period. One year after the first food bank opened in Canada, The Daily Bread Food Bank Foundation was established in Toronto. In this early era of roll-back neoliberalism (Peck and Tickell 2002), the emergence and consolidation of the Thatcherite reaction to redistributive politics was well underway, and food concerns were emerging in historically unprecedented ways in many of Canada's large cities. By 1983, there were an estimated 45 agencies in Metro Toronto alone engaged in some kind of food provision for those living in poverty (Laws, 1988). As this infrastructure was being developed in response to the devolution of state responsibility, immediate need was the operative imperative for many gap-filling community based organizations—concerns of either resisting state restructuring or intentionally planning urban and community level responses to the increase in poverty resulting from federal level funding cuts were overshadowed by the need to simply provide people with food.

What emerged from this emergency response environment in Toronto in the early 1980s was a patchwork of organizations providing stopgap food services, with little or no coordination or cooperation between them. A report in 1983 identified this lack of coordination amongst the 45 food provisioning agencies in Toronto as a significant impediment to a more effective community response (Laws 1988). By 1985, the issue still without resolution, was championed by then-mayor Art Eggleton, who called for the development of an emergency food coordinating apparatus:

> I am introducing, with those already involved in fighting the problem [of hunger], a concept called Foodshare Toronto. It will be an information service and clearing house designed to direct people in need, as well as coordinate offers of donations and services from the community (Eggleton, 1985, quoted in Laws 1988, 443).

Eggleton recommended that Foodshare Toronto be funded by Metro Toronto city council through a one-time provision of $20,000, and that the service commence in October 1985 and end three months later. The original intent was to fund a short-term City Hall hotline, connecting those with food or resources to donate to organizations in need of donations, with the collateral benefit of raising awareness about the issue of hunger in the city. FoodShare was never meant to last beyond this three-month tenure.

However, in January of 1986, one month after it was meant to be disbanded, FoodShare was holding citywide food drives (Harvey 1986, A.2). By April of that year, the organization had moved well beyond simply coordinating food services in the city, to lobbying the provincial government to reinvest in affordable housing and social assistance payments (Monsebraaten 1986, A.6). In 1987, FoodShare called on the federal government for $200,000 to fund 'alternative solutions' to the problem of hunger in Toronto (Flavelle 1987, A.6). The organization proposed to use the money to, among other things, design programs meant to "encourage low-income groups to start their own cooperative grocery stores, food-buying clubs and gardens…[which]…help build community pride and individual skills" (MacDonald quoted in, Ibid). The (then) Executive Director of FoodShare, Donna MacDonald went on to argue, "Lining up for food isn't going to change anything. It's just going to make people more helpless and dependent" (Ibid).

By 1992, though still running the 'hunger hotline', the programmatic remnant of their original mandate, FoodShare began organizing 'food stores' in the lobbies of the properties of Canada's largest public housing provider, the Metro Toronto Housing Authority, in an effort to increase the accessibility of fresh produce to tenants (Reid 1992, A.1). FoodShare began purchasing fresh produce from local farmers through the Ontario Food Terminal, and delivering the produce to low-income communities across the city, with a view to "changing the political and economic situation as it affects 'food security' [while] overhauling the food distribution system in the city" (Kane 1993, B.1). Within a few years, then, FoodShare transformed from what was meant to be a three-month effort to raise awareness about hunger in the city, while building some initial coordinating infrastructure, into something else completely. The organization had become multi-faceted and community-based—an advocacy organization, a non-

profit food distribution service, and a coordinator of food provisioning services with the capacity and resources to bring their demands to both the provincial and federal governments. The organization continues to operate in much the same way currently—though the organization's operations budget has increased from the paltry $20,000 to over $5.5 million; their revenue streams have diversified, 32% of their funds now come from social enterprise sales and services; and their program offerings have increased and expanded in scope (FoodShare, 2009).

The conceptual lineage of the GFM program can be traced to the Metro Toronto Housing 'food store' initiative of the early 1990s. Understanding the increasingly spatial dimension of food insecurity in the city, while situating the issue as part of a broader range of socio-economic pathologies (i.e. housing and income), FoodShare sought an explicitly socio-spatial strategy for increasing food security. The program, no longer confined to only the lobbies of public housing units, has expanded operations to 11 communities within the Greater Toronto Area, and draws on a variety of neighbourhood spaces, including community centres and lobbies of other community service agencies.

Though the task of the program is Herculean, its design is quite simple: FoodShare is able to procure relatively inexpensive fresh produce through bulk purchasing at the Ontario Food Terminal and from farmers in the region. Host residents are responsible for the on-the-ground organizing of the markets within their communities. Resident organizers of the GFMs make weekly orders for produce, based on typical volume of sales, resident requests, and seasonal availability, and FoodShare delivers the order to the host market. Market organizers pay roughly wholesale costs for the produce they order from FoodShare, a price that does not include, for example, the cost of delivery. By only charging resident organizers for the cost of the food FoodShare is directly subsidizing the program[2] and ensuring that the produce sold at the markets remains as inexpensive as possible. In addition, FoodShare provides training and networking opportunities for resident organizers as well as a flexible support regime determined by the needs of the particular community.

In addition to increasing access to inexpensive, fresh produce, the GFM market program also explicitly attempts to build a sense of 'place' and strengthen 'community' through the program. The strategy of having local residents organize the markets is an explicit attempt to have each market imbued with 'local' autonomy and flavour, which "uniquely reflects its community and is a vibrant and important gathering place" (FoodShare 2011).

This latter, socio-spatial aspect of the GFM program, which intentionally attempts to enhance a sense of 'place' and 'community' by fostering and showcasing of local autonomy and vibrancy must be understood as a central element of the GFM program, reflecting FoodShare's broader understanding of the socio-spatial elements of hunger and food insecurity. Importantly, the GFMs do not attempt to build this sense of place and community just anywhere—instead, they explicitly target lower income and marginalized communities, bringing fresh and affordable produce to places "where it might not otherwise be available, and where [conventional] farmers' markets are not viable because sales are too low to cover farmers' costs" (FoodShare 2011).

FoodShare's response to the issue of urban food access, through the GFM

program, illustrates the organization's understanding of the co-implicated nature of space and socio-economic marginalization. The organization's strategy explicitly and simultaneously attempts to address issues of hunger in place as well as the socio-spatial processes that produced the conditions of hunger in the first place. But the spatial politics of the GFMs go beyond the particular socio-spatial strategy they have developed for the distribution of affordable food to Toronto's food deserts. By procuring the food distributed at the GFM from local farmers, the organization is also attempting to forge an alternative food network, disentangled from the globalized and overly-commodified conventional food system, while re-inscribing more localized producer-consumer linkages on the terrain of the Toronto-region's foodscape. In rejecting and seeking to circumvent the conventional food system, the GMF program takes on the double task of re-spatializing both the demand side and the supply side of a more just and effective urban food system—no small task for one program.

Little empirical work has been done to assess the degree to which the GFM program is succeeding in this ambitious plan. Thus far, both FoodShare and the GFM program have remained largely off the radar of scholarly interest. Nor is an assessment of the 'effectiveness' or 'impact' of the GFM market program of primary concern in this paper. However, FoodShare has commissioned and administered a number of reports, including one recent study (2008) that provides some indication of the impact of the GFM program:

> 52% of adults and children are eating more fruits and vegetables, 35% prepared home cooked meals, 35% reported feeling significantly healthier, 47% said they got to know more of their neighbours and overall, 98% felt that the market had improved their neighbourhood.

Conventional and alternative food systems and the city

In order to better understand how the GFMs fit into the broader urban food system in Toronto it is worth briefly reviewing some relevant literature. It is important to emphasize here that the GFM program is not the totality of the response to the issues of food insecurity, food access and hunger in Toronto. Instead, it is more productive to understand the markets as alternative food initiatives (AFIs), which are part of a broader alternative food network (AFN) (see Levkoe 2011) situated within a globalized, commodified and spatially unequal mainstream food system.

There is a mounting indictment of the conventional food system coming from both the academy and the wider public (Albritton 2009; Kloppenburg 2004; Mikulak 2013). However, it is worth noting that some authors have quite rightly cautioned against an undisciplined conceptual binary between conventional/alternative food systems (Harris 2010; Holloway et al. 2007; Watts et al. 2005). It is better, rather, to consider various tendencies of the conventional food system, the absence of which can in turn be considered tendencies of the alternative food system. First off, as Harris (2010, 357) suggests, conventional food systems are predicated on globalized networks of "food production, distribution, storage and retail that are controlled by multinational agri-

business and retail corporations." In other words, there is a strong tendency within the conventional food systems towards vertical and horizontal integration, and so increasing control across the process of production and distribution. Concentration of that control is another key feature of the conventional food system. For example, Morgan et al., (2006, 55) have argued that the conventional food system can be conceptually represented as an hourglass-shaped production and distribution process in which a multitude of farmers feed a multitude of consumers, all mediated through an increasingly concentrated and corporately owned structure.

Harris (2010) provides a useful conceptual model for teasing out in further detail the tendencies of the conventional food system. From this perspective, it is necessarily a confluence of particular production processes and particular food products that build the character of the conventional food system. Harris (2010) notes that both the production process of the conventional food system (which is often exploitative, low-paying, etc.) and the food products of the conventional food system (which are often unhealthy, overly-processed, etc.) provide grounds with which to formulate a sustained critique of the contemporary status quo of food.

Others have turned to the spatial aspects of the increasingly globalized contemporary food system and an associated menu of pathologies it seems to be producing (Feagan 2007; Jarosz 2008). The commodified patterns of production and distribution of the conventional system notwithstanding, many have focused on the geographic nature in both framing their disapproval of the conventional food system, and in theorizing solutions. Towards these latter ends, 'place', or the 'local' seems to have emerged as the 'quiet centre' (Feagan 2007) of alternative food systems and of the politics of alternative food scholarship and practice. From this perspective, AFNs can be considered collaborative and cumulative efforts of multiple actors to re-spatialize the production and distribution processes of the conventional food system while imbedding within it more socially, economically and ecologically just attributes.

Jarosz (2008, 232) provides a useful, spatially inflected, conceptual framework for understanding AFNs as characterized:

(1) by shorter distances between producers and consumers; (2) by small farm size and scale and organic or holistic farming methods, which are contrasted with large scale, industrial agribusiness; (3) by the existence of food purchasing venues such as food cooperatives, farmers markets and CSA and local food-to-school linkages; (4) by a commitment to the social, economic and environmental dimensions of sustainable food production, distribution and consumption.

Jarosz (2008) points out that there are multiple, and potentially competing processes, interests and drivers within each of these four broad characteristics. She also notes that there remains a great deal of diversity within understandings and conceptualizations of AFNs within both popular and academic discourses, which raises questions about the effectiveness or accuracy of addressing a single alternative food system. Drawing on Venn et al., (2006), Jarosz (2008) suggests, "there is no such thing as a singular food economy, [but rather] there are important discourses surrounding being different and doing things differently" (Venn et al., 2006, quoted in Jarosz, 2008, 23).

Given that there is no firm conceptual or practical boundary between the

conventional and alternative food systems, it is difficult to label any particular consumer interface as either explicitly 'conventional' or 'alternative'. However, while it is possible to, at least conceptually, conceive of conventional grocery stores as a potential interface of an AFN, it seems unlikely that conventional grocery store produce could stand up to many of the characteristics of alternative food economies forwarded by Jarosz (2008)[3].

Harris (2010, 355) helps to clarify the matter by identifying a number of interfaces which, unlike conventional grocery stores, are more likely to be typical of AFNs, including "farmers' markets, direct marketing schemes, community supported agriculture, vegetable-delivery box schemes, community gardens and food cooperatives".

Feagan and Morris (2009, 235) meanwhile concern themselves with farmers' markets specifically, and argue that they constitute a key response to the unsustainability of the conventional food system. They argue that markets are particularly relevant interfaces of AFNs by invoking normative claims about markets through the concept of 'embeddedness'(Feagan and Morris 2009). Embeddedness, they argue, refers to a kind of more-than-consumer positionality that stands in contrast to neoclassical conceptions of the self-interested, rational individual. Drawing on Hinrichs (2003, 296) they argue, "Rather than the self-interested movements of atomized, 'rational' economic actors, as assumed by neoclassical economics, economic behavior is embedded in and mediated by a complex, often extensive web of social relations" (quoted in Feagan and Morris 2009, 236). The conceptual shift in understanding the economic realm (and associated transactions) as embedded in and mediated by a host of other social, cultural and political processes allows for a more textured analysis of consumer motivation. As they suggest, embeddedness "is a useful concept for making more apparent the transaction environment within which other values exist alongside that of price in the purchasing behavior of consumers" (236).

Feagan and Morris (2009, 236) report that such embedded attributes of the market interface, such as a shortening of the conventional food chain, bringing consumers and producers together, having access to higher quality and locally produced food, and increasing social interaction with vendors are all cited as noteworthy by patrons of markets. These embedded attributes, in other words, can be considered as differentiating experiences between the conventional and alternative food systems that are valued above and beyond simple economic calculation, by many market patrons.

Drawing on Kirwan (2004) and Penker (2006), Feagan and Morris (2009, 236) forward three "separate but interrelated spheres of embeddedness" to conceptually differentiate social, spatial and natural forms of embeddedness. Social embeddedness is characterized by desires for a sense of community, tradition, place and loyalty, based on social interaction and trust. Natural embeddedness connotes the desire for more ecologically sound and environmentally sustainable farming and distribution techniques. Issues of pesticide use, but also other pathologies of the conventional food system, such as salmonella contamination, animal welfare and meat contamination (such as mad cow disease) can all be understood as concerns of a naturally embedded economy. Finally, spatial embeddedness references the desire of consumers to interface with a more locally grounded food system more conducive to producer-consumer interaction.

It is useful to understand the GFM program within the above context—that

is, as a particular kind of modality or interface within an alternative food system. Feagan and Morris (2009) help demonstrate the particular qualities unique to the market experience that help transform the practice of food purchasing from a purely economic transaction, into a socio-cultural, ecological and spatially embedded event. They also provide a basis from which to begin to understand the terrain of markets as unique socio-spatial phenomena that have implications for both the immediate space itself (i.e. the boundary of the market itself) as well as a broader set of scalar impacts (particularly in the case of spatial embeddedness.)

However, their analysis is missing a careful consideration of the dynamics of urban food insecurity and urban food deserts and food swamps. Conventional farmers' markets do offer a consumer interface and experience that stands in contrast to chain grocery stores, however, they are still typically unevenly distributed across the urban landscape. Farmers' markets have, of course, been critiqued as scarcely better than the commercial food system in servicing marginalized urban communities (see Alkon and Ageyman 2011). In a sense then, the GFM program has identified these gaps and is designed as an alternative to the alternative, so to speak. In the following section, I will lay out in more explicit terms, ways in which to conceptualize the spaces of the GFM program as constituting a specific kind of *political* project based in a politics of place.

Free spaces and alternative food networks

Generically described as 'free spaces' (Evans, et al. 1986; Pollett 1999), these socio-spatial constructs are often heralded as resources with which marginalized populations may resist, combat and alter the conditions of their oppression. Evans et al. (1986) provide a seminal definition:

Particular sorts of public places in the community, what we call free spaces, are the environments in which people are able to learn a new self-respect, a deeper and more assertive group identity, public skills, and values of cooperation and civic virtue. Put simply, free spaces are settings between private lives and large scale institutions where ordinary citizens can act with dignity, independence and vision (17).

Polletta (1999), extends the analysis forwarded by Evans et al., by evaluating the ways in which particular kinds of free spaces are used in the development of movement politics. She focuses specifically on the character of the associational ties within and between particular spaces and participants, and the 'multiorganizational field' they comprise (8).

Polletta (1999) is further interested in the ways in which various free spaces are relevant to the "differential capacity to identify opportunities, supply leaders, recruit participants, craft mobilizing frames, and fashion new identities" (8). She proposes three classifications of free spaces: transformative, indigenous and prefigurative. In their examination of the American white power movement, Futrell and Simi (2004) refine Polletta's original construction by arguing that prefigurative politics is actually a cross-cutting quality inherent to both transformative and indigenous free spaces. Accordingly, they collapse Polletta's three categories into two—indigenous prefigurative space and transformative prefigurative space. According to Futrell and Simi (2004) indigenous prefigurative spaces "are small, locally-bound, interpersonal networks where members

engage in political socialization, boundary marking, and other cultural practices" (17). Positionality is thus revealed within their analysis to be an important consideration in the construction of political identity. Indigenous prefigurative spaces create movement actors, and thus movements, through "benign, everyday activities in settings such as family homes, Bible study groups, informal parties and crash pads"(Futrell and Simi, 2004, 16). Transformative prefigurative space, on the other hand, reveals the importance of networks to the broader politics of social change. According to Futrell and Simi (2004), transformative prefigurative spaces facilitate the coming together, either physically or virtually, of "otherwise unconnected local networks into broader webs of…culture and identity" (17).

Drawing on Hardt and Negri (2000), Paul Routledge (2004) uses the notion of 'convergence space' to illustrate the role of free spaces within alterglobalization movements. Emphasizing the role of networks, as do Futrell and Simi (2004), and agreeing with Hardt and Negri, Routledge argues that the current global economic system constitutes an emerging empire characterized by, "a decentered, deterritorializing apparatus of imperial control" (Hardt and Negri 2000, quoted in Routledge, 2004, 334). He argues further that "there is no place of power—constituted by networks, it is both *everywhere and nowhere*, a non-place" (334, emphasis original). While Hardt and Negri argue that social movement actors must respond to the contemporary crisis of neoliberal empire by creating 'non-places' of resistance, Routledge diverges with them in arguing that instead social movement actors need to construct 'convergence spaces' of "associational politics that constitute a diverse, contested coalition of place-specific social movements, which prosecute conflict on a variety of multi-scalar terrains that include both material places and virtual spaces" (334). Within this conceptualization, social actors construct networks of resistance through spaces nested within both the smaller scales of biopolitics, and the broader scales of regional, national and supranational geographies.

Also writing within the free spaces paradigm, Pickerill et al. (2006) theorize 'autonomous geographies' as "multi scalar strategies that weave together spaces and times, constituting in-between and overlapping spaces, blending resistance and creation, and combining theory and practice" (730). Of the interrelated processes buttressing the theory of autonomous spaces, two are worth briefly noting here. First, Pickerill et al. (2006) pick up on Gibson-Graham's (1996) contention that globalization is comprised of both a material reality and a mediated discursive terrain of multiple and competing narratives. They argue that, through the articulations of competing narratives, autonomous geographies are in fact both temporal and spatial strategies of resistance. Rearticulations of past struggles and continuations of current struggles (through time and across space) "provide[s] sociospatial reference points for projecting autonomous visions into the present and future" (Pickerill et al. 2006, 735). Second, Pickerill et al. (2006) argue that autonomous geographies are interstitial spaces comprised of an always-incomplete terrain of power relations (737). Although autonomy always exists in locality, they argue, autonomous geographies are not centrally concerned with transforming space, but rather, with altering power relations through space. Autonomous geographies, as they mediate across scale from the boilpolitics of the body, through to the global and back again, are always a series of constant and

multiple negotiations "between those seeking autonomy and their interactions with the family, workplace, consumer society, institutions and the state that impose a series of comprises" (Ibid).

A final, and more recent intervention into the free space literature to be considered here comes from Carlsson and Manning (2010) in their formulation of nowtopias. The plane on which nowtopias operate, however, is better understood as running parallel to, rather than directly connected with, the considerations of free space literature above. While place is a central and defining characteristic of the above free space concepts, forming the pivot of identity formulation amongst a particular group, the emphasis for nowtopias rests elsewhere. Instead, the processes of production, specifically labour—or more precisely the rejection of particular forms of labour—form the central modality through which nowtopias are expressed. According to Carlsson and Manning (2010, 926), nowtopian practice "sets in relief the basic violence at the heart of capitalist production: the process of turning creative, useful human activity into abstract labour dedicated to producing value for people other than those who labour". The nowtopia is outside of the traditional realm of wage labour in which nowtopians are freed "to create, to shape, to invent, and to cooperate without monetary incentive" (925). This materiality, however, reveals spatiality to the nowtopia. Not only do the activities of nowtopians imply a rejection of capitalistic production, they are also particular spaces defined by a rearticulation of social relations in which people are explicitly "not working class" (emphasis in original, 925)

A centrally important feature of each of the iterations of free space theory briefly considered above is the emphasis on a balance between territorial and relational conceptions of space. In response to what was becoming a fetishistic relationship with the 'local', a variety of scholars have begun to problematize the valorization of this particular scale. Whether warning of 'the local trap' (Purcell 2006), 'militant particularisms' (Harvey 2001), or 'defensive localism' (Allen 1999; DuPuis and Goodman 2005), many have highlighted the potential regressive turn associated with strictly bounded and insular conceptions of the local.

Contrasting this defensive localism with a 'diversity receptive localization', Hinrichs (2003) has demonstrated that there is a viable counter-tendency in the politics of the local. Predicated on relational conceptions of space, which understand the local as constitutive of and implicated in trans-local flows, rather than a hived-off and disconnected site, this perspective reflects what Amin (2002, 397) has called a shift from a "politics of place to a politics in place." Massey (2007, 15) has similarly called for a local politics that "thinks beyond the local," while DuPuis and Goodman (2005, 369) have suggested:

> An inclusive and reflexive politics in place would understand local food systems not as local 'resistance' against a global capitalist 'logic' but as mutually constitutive, imperfect, political process in which the local and the global make each other on an everyday basis.

The Good Food Markets—towards a diverse and receptive free space?

The preceding discussion attends to conceptions of the spatial politics of relatively fixed, though multi-scalar places. My purpose is not to argue that the GFMs can (at east currently) be accurately described as such free spaces, but rather to begin asking the question: what can be gained by understanding the GFMs within the rubric of free spaces? Or, in other words, what can the free space literature tell us, at a conceptual level, about the GFMs? And from an inductive perspective, what can the GFMs tell us about free spaces? I offer here, by way of conclusion, a preliminary attempt to begin answering these questions.

First, and perhaps most abstractly, framing the GFM program within free space literature brings into the field of view a rich and vibrant body of social movement literature. As mentioned above, free space literature is largely a result of the confluence of critical human geography and social movement scholars thinking about the role of place in transformative politics. Very rarely does 'community development' literature and practice intersect with social movement theory and practice, and when it does, scholars have been quite critical of the former's ability to effect substantive and structural social change (DeFillipis et al. 2010; Incite! Women of Color Against Violence 2007). However, it seems to me that there is potential in the GFM program to engender a kind of transformative politics specifically because it has been explicitly designed in such a way as to maximize the degree of autonomy of local decision making into the hands of local organizers. FoodShare, in this case, plays only a minimal role in procuring and transporting produce, leaving the actual character of any given market up to the organizers of that market—and the markets do vary significantly. While some markets offer a single, modestly stocked table of goods, others have multiple tables overflowing with produce. Some of the markets provide children's activities, some hold mini cooking classes, and some have outdoor wood burning bake ovens to cook bread and pizza. Some markets cater to seniors, while others focus on newcomer populations, in response to the demographics of the host community. I do not intend to fall in to the 'local trap' here, but rather mean only to emphasize the potential in the local autonomy of groups of market coordinators, disentangled from the broader political economy within which a large community-based organization like FoodShare must operate.

As Polletta (1999) argues, free spaces are so compelling, in part, because of the potential in them to develop movement leaders, attract participants, shape mobilizing frames and, ultimately, lead towards the development of unique, and, counter-cultural identities. Of course it is not inevitable that GFMs will develop into the vanguard of a radical and transformative urban food politics, however, appreciating the conceptual possibility in concert with the degree of autonomy each market has vis-à-vis FoodShare, at least begins to reveal the potential of such a project.

A second insight offered by free space literature warns against fetishizing the local as either necessarily progressive or as the most obvious or effective scale from which to launch transformative urban political projects. Local solidarities ossifying into regressive militant particularisms (Harvey 2001) or a destructive defensive localism (Allen 1999) are tendencies not to be ignored. It is equally unproductive to fall into

an a-spatial analysis that posits the local as the *de facto* scale of change. Rather, free space literature demonstrates that it is more productive to understand local space as part of broader, multi-scalar networks, which are continually involved in the process of mediating between individuals, communities, regions, countries, and beyond. More practically, we can see that the GFMs, through the program's very design, has forged strong links with regional alternative food economies, while building a city-wide network of alternative food markets. These mutli-scalar practices can be considered a central component of the program's potential to affect a broader movement of alternative food politics. Forging new links, at various scales, while strengthening those existing connections could help develop a rich and textured alternative food network, neither solely local nor global, but implicated across various scales.

This leads to a third and related observation arising from considering the GFM program within the context of free space literature. Just as there is nothing inherently 'good' about the local level, there is nothing inherently 'bad' about the global level. As Gibson-Graham has argued, autonomous geographies have such transformative potential in part because they provide a platform from which to aggregate and articulate competing discourses of globalization across both time and space. This, for example, presents the opportunity for current GFM organizers to situate their work within the historical development of the GFM program, paying heed to the particular political economic conditions it was originally meant to combat. At the same time, this gestures at the possibility of forging transnational links and networks of solidarity with other activists engaged in similar projects around the world. Put simply, transforming the contemporary food system is certainly a local project, but it must simultaneously be a global project.

Finally, and importantly, the free space literature enables an optimistic intervention into contemporary critical scholarship. Compounding socio-economic, political and ecological crises have, as Mike Davis (2010) argues, brought an end to the world as we knew it. In his words, "only a return to explicitly utopian thinking can clarify the minimal conditions for the preservation of human solidarity in the face of convergent planetary crises" (Davis, 2010, 45). Within this context, I understand both the GFM program and the notion of free spaces, replete with the promises and challenges, the certainties and ambiguities, to be profoundly connected to utopian thinking. Both the GFMs and free spaces (perhaps even GFMs as free spaces) do exist, crucially, despite their illogic vis-à-vis the mainstream and conventional political economy/ecology. This persistence, and the possibility of conceptually combining the crucial elements of each—to theorize a robust, vibrant and multiscalar free space interface within a burgeoning network of alternative food networks—is itself cause for optimism. And lest this be considered too sentimental or idealist, I return to Davis (2010, 26) for justification:

> If this sounds like a sentimental call to the barricades….then so be it; because on the basis of the evidence before us, taking a 'realist' view of the human prospect, like seeing Medusa's head, would simply turn us into stone.

Acknowledgements

Notes

[1] In a recent literature synthesis, Health Canada (2013, 25) concluded, "there is no evidence for the widespread existence of food deserts in Canada [though] evidence is stronger for the existence of food swamps." In contrast to the food desert metaphor, which is meant to convey a complete absence of food in particular geographic areas, food swamps are areas with an abundance of fast food restaurants and convenience stores, though no grocery stores or green grocers.

[2] The GFM program is funded through FoodShare's annual budget, similar to other programs offered by the organization. There is no expectation that the GFM program operate on a cost recovery basis.

[3] Within the context of low-income and marginalized neighbourhoods in the US, the point might be moot anyway—as Wrigley et al. (2003) have demonstrated, mainstream grocery stores have largely abandoned marginalized neighbourhoods, leaving these places with few options with which to interface with either the conventional or alternative food economy. In the Canadian context, the spatial distribution of food stores seems to be more equitable in some cases (Kirkpatrick and Tarasuk 2010), though not in others (Larsen and Gilliland 2008; Latham and Moffat 2007; Peters and McCreary 2008). In any case, the issue of food deserts is in need of further research in the Canadian context (see Health Canada 2013).

References

Albritton, R. 2009. *Let them eat junk: How capitalism creates hunger and obesity*. Winnipeg, MB: Arbeiter Ring Publishing.

Alkon, A.H., and J. Agyeman, eds. 2011. *Cultivating food justice: Race, class and sustainability*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Allen, P. 1999. Reweaving the food security safety net: Mediating entitlement and entrepreneurship. *Agriculture and Human Values* 16 (2): 117-129.

Amin, A. 2002. Spatialities of globalization. *Environment and Planning A* 34(3): 385-400.

Carlsson, C. and Manning, F. 2010. Nowtopia: Strategic exodus? *Antipode* 42 (4): 924-953.

Classens, M., J.J. McMurtry and J. Sumner. (forthcoming). Doing markets differently: The case of FoodShare Toronto's Good Food Markets. In *Social Purpose Enterprises: Case Studies in Doing Business Differently*, ed. J. Quarter and S. Ryan. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.

Daily Bread Food Bank. 2011. Who's hungry, faces of hunger: 2012 profile of hunger

in the GTA. (Accessed February 18, 2014 from http://www.dailybread.ca/wp-content/uploads/2012/09/WhosHungryReport2012LowRes.pdf)

Davis, M. 2010. Who will build the ark? *New Left Review* 61: 29-46.

Davison, J. 2014. California's crippling drought could cost – and benefit – Canadians. (Accessed March 5, 2014 http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/california-s-crippling-drought-could-cost-and-benefit-canadians-1.2541844)

DeFilippis, J., R. Fisher, and E. Shragge. 2010. *Contesting community: The limits and potential of local organizing*. New Jersey: Rutgers University Press.

DuPuis, E.M. and D. Goodman. 2005. Should we go 'home' to eat? Toward a reflexive politics of localism. *Journal of Rural Studies* 21: 359-371.

Evans, S., and H. Boyte. 1986. *Free spaces: The sources of democratic change in America*. New York: Harper & Row.

Feagan, R. 2007. The place of food: Mapping out the 'local' in local food systems. *Progress in Human Geography* 31 (1): 23-42.

Feagan, R. and D. Morris. 2002. Consumer quest for embeddedness: A case study of the Brantford farmers' market. *International Journal of Consumer Studies* 33: 235-243.

Fielding, J.E., and P.A. Simon. 2011. Food deserts or food swamps? *Archives of Internal Medicine* 171 (13): 1171-1172.

Food and Agriculture organization of the United Nations. 2014. *FAO Food Price Index*. (Accessed March 7, 2014 http://www.fao.org/worldfoodsituation/foodpricesindex/en/)

Food Banks of Canada. 2009. *Hunger count 2010: A comprehensive report on hunger and food bank use in Canada, and recommendations for change*. (Accessed February 27, 2011 http://www.cafb-acba.ca/main.cfm).

FoodShare. 2009. *Annual Report 2009*. (Accessed February, 17, 2011 http://www.foodshare.net/whoweare-annual-reports.htm).

FoodShare. 2011. *Good Food Markets*. (Accessed February, 12, 2011 http://www.foodshare.net/animators02.htm).

Futrell, R. and P. Simi. 2004. Free spaces: Collective identity, and the persistence of U.S. white power activism. *Social Problems* 51 (1): 16-42.

Gibson-Graham, J.K. 1996. *The end of capitalism (as we knew it): A feminist critique of political economy*. Cambridge, Mass: Blackwell Publishers.

Hackworth, J. 2007. *The neoliberal city*. Ithaca; London: Cornell University Press.

Hardt, M. and Negri, A. 2000. *Empire.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Harris, E. 2010. Eat local? Constructions of place in alternative food politics. *Geography Compass* 4 (4): 355-369.

Harvey, D. 2001. *Spaces of capital: Towards a critical geography*. New York: Rutledge.

Harvey, R. 1986. FoodShare starts blitz to feed Metro poor. *Toronto Star*, January 28, A.2.

Health Canada. 2013. Measuring the food environment in Canada. (Accessed July 6 2014 from http://publications.gc.ca/collections/collection_2013/sc-hc/H164-155-2012-eng.pdf).

Health Canada. 2007. Canadian community health survey, cycle 2.2, nutrition (2004): Income-related household food security in Canada. (Accessed February 18, 2011

from http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/index-eng.php).

Heynen, N. 2005. Justice of eating in the city: The political ecology of urban hunger. in In *The nature of cities: Urban political ecology and the politics of urban metabolism*, edited by N. Heynen, M. Kaika, and E. Swyngedouw, 124-136. London, New York: Routledge.

Hinrichs, C. 2003. The practice and politics of food system localization. *Journal of Rural Studies* 19: 33-45.

Holloway, L., E. Dowler, H. Toumainen, M. Kneafsey, L. Venn, and R. Cox, R. 2007. Beyond the 'alternative' – 'conventional' divide? Thinking differently about food production-consumption relationships. In *Alternative food geographies: representation and practice*, ed. D. Maye, L. Holloway, and M Kneafsey, 77-93. Oxford: Elsevier.

Incite! Women of Color Against Violence 2007. *The revolution will not be funded: Beyond the non-profit industrial complex.* Cambridge, Mass: South End Press.

Jarosz, L. 2008. The city in the country: Growing alternative food networks in metropolitan areas. *Journal of Rural Studies* 24 (3): 231-244.

Johnston, Josee. (2007). Counter-hegemony or bourgeois piggery? Food politics and the case of FoodShare. In *The fight over food: Producers, consumers and activists challenge the global food system*, ed. W. Wright and G. Middendorf. University Park, Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 93-120.

Kane, M. 1993. Groups try new ways to share the fare. *Toronto Star*, July 7, B.1.

Kirwan, J. 2004. Alternative strategies in the UK agro-food system: Interrogating the alterity of farmers' markets. *Sociologia Ruralis* 44: 395-415.

Kloppenburg, J. 2004. *First the seed: The political economy of plant biotechnology.* Madison, WC: The University of Wisconsin Press.

Larsen, K., and J. Gilliland. 2008. Mapping the evolution of 'food deserts' in a Canadian city: supermarket accessibility in London, Ontario, 1961 – 2005. *International Journal of Health Geographics* 7: 7-16.

Latham, J., and T. Moffat. 2007. Determinants of variation in food cost and availability in two socioeconomically contrasting neighbourhoods of Hamilton, Ontario, Canada. *Health & Place* 13 (1): 273-287.

Laws, G. Privatization and the local welfare state: The case of Toronto's social services. *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, New Series, 13 (4): 433-448.

Levkoe, C. 2011. Towards a transformative food politics. *Local Environment 16*(7): 687-705.

Massey, D. 2007. *World City.* Cambridge, MA: Polity Press.

McClintock, N. 2010. Why farm the city? Theorizing urban agriculture through a lens of metabolic rift. *Cambridge Journal of Regions, Economy and Society* 3: 191-207.

McClintock, N. 2013. Radical, reformist, and garden-variety neoliberal: Coming to terms with urban agriculture's contradictions. *Local Environment*: 1-25. DOI 10.1080/13549839.2012.75279.

Mikulak, M. 2013. *The politics of the pantry: Stories, food, and social change.* Montreal, QC: McGill-Queen's University Press.

Monsebraaten, L. 1986. FoodShare seeks province's help in crusade against hunger in Metro. *Toronto Star*, April 2, A.6.

Morgan, K., T. Marsden, and J. Murdoch. 2006. *Worlds of food*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Peck, J., and A. Tickell. 2002. Neoliberalizing space. *Antipode* 34 (3): 380-404.

Penker, M. 2006. Mapping and measuring the ecological embeddedness of food supply chains. *Geoforum* 37: 368-379.

Peters, E.J., and T.A. McCreary. 2008. Poor neighbourhoods and the changing geography of food retailing in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, 1984-2004. *Canadian Journal of Urban Research 17* (1): 78-106.

Pickerill, J. and P. Chatterton. 2006. Notes towards autonomous geographies: Creation, resistance and self-management as survival tactics. *Progress in Human Geography* 30: 730-746.

Polletta, F. 1999. 'Free spaces' in collective action. *Theory and Society* 28 (1): 1-38.

Purcell, M. 2006. Urban democracy and the local trap. *Urban Studies 43*: 1921-1941.

Reid, S. 1991. Food store's bounty masks hunger hotline. *Toronto Star*, November 5, A.1.

Routledge, P. 2003. Convergence space: Process geographies of grassroots globalization. *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 28 (3): 333-349.

Sbicca, J. 2013. The need to feed: Urban metabolic struggles of actually existing radical projects. *Critical Sociology*: 1-18. DOI: 10.1177/0896920513497375

Sumner, J., J.J. McMurty, and M. Classens. 2013. Pitfalls and possibilities: The case of FoodShare Toronto's Good Food Markets in Toronto, Ontario, Canada. In *Farming the City: Food as a Tool for Urban Development*, ed. F. Miazzo and M. Minkjan. Amsterdam: CITIES Foundation, 73-79.

Tarasuk, V., A. Mitchell and N. Dachner. 2012. Household food insecurity in Canada, 2012. Toronto: Reseach to identify policy options to reduce food insecurity (PROOF). (Accessed February 27, 2014 http://nutritionalsciences.lamp.utoronto.ca).

Venn, L., M. Kneafsey, L. Holloway, R. Cox, E. Dowler, and H. Toumainen. 2006. Researching European 'alternative' food networks: Some methodological considerations. *Area* 38 (3): 233-242.

Watts, D., B. Ilbery, and D. Maye. 2005. Making reconnections in agro-food geography: Alternative systems of food provision. *Progress in Human Geography* 29 (1): 22-40.

Wrigley, N., D. Warm, and B. Margetts. 2003. Deprivation, diet and food retail access: findings from the Leeds 'food deserts' study. *Environment and Planning A* 35 (1); 151-188.